

**THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN THE PROCESS OF  
CREATING MEANING IN A PROFESSIONAL  
ORGANISATION**

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## ABSTRACT

This auto-ethnographic project concerns itself with the processes of how meaning in an organisational setting is created, changed, sustained and 'achieved'. Its contributory value lies in the inductive development of a '**tropological approach**' to the investigation of sense-making processes in organisations.

Positioned in an interpretive-hermeneutic tradition, the major research strategy of participant observation and its supplementary techniques (e.g. qualitative interviewing) were activated to explore sense-making processes. This engagement in the field was complemented by the application of three frameworks derived from the discipline of linguistics. These were: a structuralist approach (as based on Saussure, Jakobson, Lodge), speech act theory (Austin, Searle) and discourse analysis (Fairclough).

The application of the first framework to data explored the character of signs as well as the relationship between signs. The latter were defined as either metaphorical or metonymical in character. The tropes derived from these relationships, i.e. metaphor and metonymy, provided an early trajectory for further data interpretation. Naturally occurring talk, including organisational stories, talk as recorded in meetings, artifacts including written texts, buildings, equipment and geographical arrangements were analysed in terms of their metaphorical and/or metonymical significance in processes of meaning creation. The interplay of metonymies, i.e. processes on the basis of physical or causal contiguity, and metaphors, translation and interpretation processes were shown to render the experience of the organisation essentially symbolic. A third trope, irony, emerged as an important figure during the research process and was integrated into the tropological approach. Metonymy and irony are undertheorised in organisation studies.

Within the second organising framework the performative value of tropes was investigated, i.e. in how far 'talk and action' form a dialectic whole. In particular, the question how organisations become active agents, who "think" and "speak" and "act" was investigated with the help of the voice metaphor, exploring the relationship between individuals, agents and principals. Different voices (new voices, fading and fluctuating voices, dissenting voices, having no voice) were investigated. Meaning, although inchoate and in perpetual flux was shown to be linked to the ability to transcend individual status and claim agency on behalf on a higher principal. Deviant meaning and interpretation were investigated as occurring in the trope irony, but also in the denial of metonymical causal linkages between signs and divergent particularisation processes within metaphorical interpretation.

Finally, meaning as derived from a wider discursive environment (Higher Education environment) was investigated from a critical point of view, focusing on hegemonial processes and the manufacture of consent, which "normalised" the hidden assumptions of certain discourses by drawing on metaphorical and metonymical devices inherent in language. Irony, again, was shown to be an expression of divergent meaning interpretation. The exercise of power as well as resistance were shown to be dialectically enacted at the interstices of everyday practice. These transient, elusive processes are expressed in language, in particular the figures of speech.

In sum, the suggested tropological approach shows metaphor as being both constraining and emancipatory in its performative value, metonymy as being the first and foremost habitus of cultural knowledge and irony as being precariously suspended between conservatism and change. The contributory value of this approach lies in the inclusion of two tropes, metonymy and irony, which have not been sufficiently understood or theorised in organisation studies.



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## List of Abbreviations

AQR	=	Annual Quality Review
BITC	=	Business and Information Technology Centre
BABS	=	BA in Business Studies
BAIBL	=	BA in International Business and Languages
BDO	=	Business Development Office
BP	=	Business Policy
CMS	=	Computer and Management Studies
FE	=	Further Education
FSL	=	Financial Studies and Law
HE	=	Higher Education
HEFCE	=	Higher Education Funding Council
HND	=	Higher National Diploma
HoNV	=	Head of New Ventures
HoR	=	Head of Research
HoU/S	=	Head of Undergraduate Programmes/Staff Development
HoPG	=	Head of Postgraduate Programmes
IB+L	=	International Business and Language
LTi	=	Learning and Teaching Institute
MBA	=	Master of Business Administration
PAG	=	Policy Advisory Group
PPD	=	Personal and Professional Development
PRC	=	Policy Research Unit
RAE	=	Research Assessment Exercise
RVL	=	Regular Visiting Lecturer
SAP	=	Senior Academic Postholder
SAT	=	Speech Act Theory
SAV	=	Speech Act Verb
SDR	=	Staff Development Review
SBM	=	School of Business and Management
SBS	=	Sheffield Business School
nSBS	=	new Sheffield Business School
oSBS	=	old Sheffield Business School
SCP	=	Sheffield City Polytechnic
SHU	=	Sheffield Hallam University
SPEES	=	Special Pensions Enhanced Education Scheme
TESOL	=	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages



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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

This chapter will provide the reader with an overview of the thesis, which includes reflections on my own, the author's, involvement in the research scene, followed by the resulting paradigmatic stance, research strategy and techniques. A chapter-by-chapter résumé will outline the content and the development of the project. The provision of a short narrative of the researched organisation will enable the reader to follow the analysis more easily. Finally, a short reflection on the dilemmas facing the organisational researcher will conclude this chapter.

It is my belief that the reader of this thesis will only be able to understand, follow and finally critically evaluate the text, if from its very beginning the author abandons her objectivist disguise and presents herself at the outset. Because my biography and personal affiliations are inseparably related to the selection of the topic area and research strategy, it is crucial to share them with the reader rather than pretend to write from a stance of uninvolved (and superior) neutrality.

### **1.1. A Piece of Autobiography and the Emergence of the "Theme"**

This text is not written by an experienced researcher or anthropologist, but by a student of organisations. I have always been interested in what people do, how and why. Initially, fictional prose taught me a great deal. In fact, my first professional indoctrination (Mintzberg 1991) and socialisation took place within a traditional German university, i.e. in the spirit of the German "Geisteswissenschaft," a phrase coined by Dilthey (1979) or liberal art as opposed to a "Naturwissenschaft" or natural science. It was Wilhelm Dilthey (1823 - 1911) in particular who introduced to the cultural sciences the method of "verstehen" - which will be drawn on in this thesis. "Verstehen" seeks to understand the inner minds and feelings of human beings and how they manifest themselves in action, in

institutions and organisations. This describes the spirit of the interpretive paradigm, within which the ideal, spiritual concept . comes first - reification are instruments which allow the researcher to apprehend non-tangible concepts.

Both private and professional reasons brought me to the UK - where I started to work after some time at what was then a swiftly grown and successful polytechnic (Sheffield City Polytechnic, from here on SCP). My socialisation fell into an area of unprecedented change in the UK Higher Education environment, which was reflected in organisational changes of a strategic nature, resulting in organisational trauma/resistance to change (Gray 1992). A more detailed discussion of HE - as well as methodological issues - will follow in chapters seven and three respectively.

Undergoing a second extended training/indoctrination period by taking a MBA degree which became the first beacon in my journey of creating sense proved conducive in providing a rational explanation for the phenomena of organisational resistance I had experienced around me, and as such I could rationalise my own long and partly painful socialisation process, the difficulties of which I had until then blamed on my own personal shortcomings. However, the experience of trying to make sense out of chaos and contradictory information remained with me and provided the motivational basis for the selection for one of the topic areas. Additionally, on entry into the UK higher education environment, the way language was used was fundamentally different from my previous experience in Germany (where I both studied and worked as an employee in a University



environment). A simple term like "student" for example seemed to connote something very different in either country.

My entry experience (Louis 1980, 1990; Van Maanen and Schein 1979 ) to SBS happened in September 1989, as a “Lektorin”, i.e. very much on the periphery of the newly formed school. The entry experience was - not unusually - characterised by confusion (Waneous 1992), although I experienced mine as mainly “linguistic” in character (Stewart and Logan 1993, Manning 1979, Jablin 1984). I did not understand the meaning system of the school. I could not make sense of terms such as “customer”, “portfolio”, “consultancy”, “mission statement”, “business plan” , “internal market” and so on. It might be possible to view the usage of business language as unproblematic and the arrival of new managerial philosophies as welcome, rather than shunned given the polytechnic’s traditional close links to business and commerce. However, my own entry experience into what was then SCP did not reflect this at all.

So, on top of the "normal" socialisation process, "linguistic confusion" reigned and what had been familiar once (higher education environment), seemed strange now (Louis 1990).

As part of the general adaptation process, I had to learn the organisational language. And although today I am much more familiar - though not necessarily at ease - with the prevailing discourse in higher education, I still feel alienated and "aloof" at times. I have recently taken on a new position in my school and am currently being resocialised. Again, it strikes me how much "learning of language" is associated with this process.

Linked to this personal linguistic confusion is the central theme of this thesis, which is that an understanding of how language works is essential to the understanding of organisational processes and culture (see Alvesson and Willmott 1992, Barley 1983, Barley, Meyer and Gash 1988, Cohen and Musson 1995 and 1996, Gergen 1992).

Although the literature about organisational culture has exploded and the uncritical usage of the word has rendered it almost a platitude, there are nevertheless some studies which concern themselves with the analysis of language and language use in organisational settings, and apply a linguistic focus as their main method to understand cultural processes. Some of these studies will be reviewed in chapter two. This thesis intends to be a contribution in this area, with the additional benefit to observe and record language use over a long period of time. The emphasis of this thesis is on language and language use, not on the psychology of the characters involved.

#### **1.1.1. Affiliations, Allegiances and Research Orientation**

The most basic assumption of this thesis is that it is not humanly possible to be free of bias. However, it is possible to account for it, and in particular to openly reflect and comment upon it. I have already tried to account how my research interests emerged and are linked to my biography. Also, I have tried to make explicit my cultural affiliations both in terms of my national culture (German) and in terms of my first indoctrination phase (Geisteswissenschaften). I am also a white female - and although I cannot be



counted among organised feminist or any other political group - I could be described as a "Sympathisant" (i.e. one who is actively sympathising with).

With regard to my research affiliations, I see the researcher herself as the research instrument per excellence, who will have to switch from the object of study to herself to theory in order fully understand the research scene. By applying this three-way switching process (McAuley 1985) this thesis is clearly located in the hermeneutic tradition, focusing on single occurrences rather than universal laws. Within this tradition the "subjectivity" of the researcher needs to be transcended to self-awareness as researcher. In this sense, this project can also be viewed as developmental and self-exploring.

### **1.1.2. A Journey**

With regards to the developmental and self-exploring aspects of this thesis it is possible to liken it to a journey, in the sense that emotional, intellectual and even spiritual understanding evolved in the process of researching, reflecting and writing. As with every journey the travelling is as important as the arrival. The travelling consists of the intellectual development in so far as theoretical frameworks and debates had to be understood and applied; emotional development took place in so far as some of the experienced initial confusion has been satisfactorily removed: a catharsis effect in the Aristotelian sense. Some insights into the spiritual function of role behaviour and the function of language were made when researching the process of the role player's transcendence. Finally, the arrival comprises the submission of the thesis, the pending viva

and the desired award of the doctoral title. Arrivals imply new departures and a reorientation of private and professional self in the light of the gained understanding is ongoing.

## **1.2. Paradigmatic Stance**

From the above it is clear that this thesis is written from an interpretive paradigm (Burrell and Morgan 1979). A paradigm can be described as the "very basic meta-theoretical assumptions" (p.23) a researcher makes about life and how it is best explored. Within the interpretive paradigm the external world can only be accessed via subjective experience. Any claims of the possibility of the researcher being uninvolved in the research scene are denied. On the contrary, the main emphasis lies on exploring the relationship between the researcher and the research scene/"objects". Within this framework the social world is understood to emerge - the result of ceaselessly negotiated and renegotiated intersubjectively shared meanings, i.e. it is constructed (Berger and Luckman 1966). The researcher's aim is to shed light on the process of meaning creation and her own role in this process. Social reality is as such difficult to fixate, however, it is possible to examine its major medium of intersubjectivity - language and artifacts - to gain access into the process of constructing meaning. Language is also in its very essence symbolic. Therefore the exploration of symbolic sign systems will be one of the major techniques used to decode social reality.



Nowhere in this thesis will the existence of an external reality be denied - i.e. I do not represent a solipsist position. I believe in a reality independent of human cognition.

However, the only means to apprehend this reality is human cognition and therefore one must strive for intersubjectivity rather than objectivity.

Organisations within this framework are seen as concepts, the meaning and significance of which do not consist exclusively of tangible objects, but in their essence they are a subjective construction of individual human beings, who through the use of language and interactions may create a social world of intersubjectively shared meanings (Burrell and Morgan 1979:261). Even its supposedly tangible "real" aspects are ultimately connoted with subjective constructions of individual human beings. They are in their essence symbolic.

### **1.2.1. Gathering Insights (Research Strategy and Techniques)**

Having explained and laid open my preconceptions and paradigmatic orientation, elucidated my interests, what puzzles me and provides the motivational drive and rationale for choosing the briefly described topic areas, it follows that ethnography will be the major approach to studying one single case in depth and over time.

Ethnography refers to observation of people, in situ: finding them where they are, staying with them in some role which will allow intimate observation of certain parts of their behaviour and reporting it in ways useful to social sciences, but not harmful to those

observed (Dingwall 1980). The ethnographic approach as a means of organisational research has its roots in anthropology and has become quite popular in recent decades - though partly this trend reflects some disillusionment with the quantitative method in social research (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). However, at the same time this development has brought diversification and disagreement. Three positions seem to be found among ethnographers. First, there is a belief that the same criteria (validity, reliability and generalisability) must be applied to ethnographic research in a similar vein as applied to quantitative research, on the grounds that these are criteria by which all "scientific" work should be judged (e.g. Miles and Huberman 1984, Silverman 1993). A second group contends that ethnography is an alternative to quantitative social research and therefore criteria by which ethnography are to be judged should be different to those used by positivist researchers. However, there is a wide disagreement as to what these criteria should be. Thus, Leach (1982) believes that a good ethnographic account is one which captures the richness, complexity and diversity of social reality: "Ethnographers should not see themselves as seekers after truth, their purpose is to gain insights into other people's behaviour as well as their own" (p. 24). Atkinson (1991) contends that qualitative work has to be convincing and useful to a certain audience. Finally, there is a group that falls into a postmodern tradition. It argues that the character of qualitative research implies that there can be no fixed criteria for judging its products. Smith (1984) argues that any attempt to establish "non arbitrary" criteria for ethnographic research will unavoidably be marked by confusion and inconsistency, since we can have no direct and certain knowledge of an independent reality. In this view, an ethnographic account is valid if the



audience agrees with it, and the ultimate basis for such agreement is that the interpreters share, or come to share after an open dialogue and justification, similar values and interests.

In agreement with Leach (1982:24) I would describe the purpose of this piece of work as to gain insight into other people's behaviour as well as my own by capturing the richness, complexity and diversity of organisational life via language use. The criteria of whether this has been done successfully will be in the end established by the examiners of this thesis and whether after dialogue and justification (the viva) a mutually shared account can be constructed. Another source of "verification" are those who have already registered an interest in this project and will want to read the final result. Finally, the future application of the developed 'topological' model to other settings will provide another aspect of verification.

### **1.2.2. The Interdisciplinary Approach**

My first background lies in the field of literary theory (Literaturwissenschaft) and linguistics. It is for this reason that other disciplines such as literary theory and linguistics shall inform this project and provide the perspective through which the data will be analysed. It is mainly from the field of semiology that some of the concepts and methods will be borrowed. Semiology is the study of signs - of which the language system constitutes the most important subsystem. Semiotics concerns all the principles by which signification occurs. Signification refers to the processes by which words, and other signs

such as behaviours or objects carry meaning for the members of a given community. The notion of the sign is not restricted to words/utterances, but can be expanded to all other areas, including corporate and organisational artifacts. Artifacts constitute systems of communication which organisations build up within themselves. They can be complimentary, supplementary or contradictory to other organisational communication systems. Together with language they reflect cultural quiddity. I shall explore to what extent they are symbols of a socially constructed reality and if and when they speak louder than the officially constructed versions of reality. Authors such as Raspa (1990), Larsen and Schultz (1990) and Schwartz (1990a) claim that it is possible to go behind the artifacts to a “root metaphor” of an organisation , permitting a holistic interpretation of the culture in question.

In short, the study of signs, both verbal and artifactual, forms the framework for the study. As such, an attempt will be made to combine two different fields, viz. that of semiology and that of organisation theory. I will show how the espousal of a theoretical organising framework does not distract from the ethnographic work; rather the process is one of mutual cross-fertilisation and enrichment.

### **1.2.3. Researching what One Knows?! The Single Case and Auto-ethnography**

The longitudinal nature of this project (i.e. to observe language use in everyday life over an extended period) would make it very difficult to achieve the intensity of involvement and richness of data if a number of cases were to be explored. The objective of this text is



to catch the complexity of a single case (Hamel 1992, Kennedy 1976, Stake 1994, Stake 1995, Stouffer 1941), to investigate its particularity and to finally "understand its activities within important circumstances" (Stake 1995:ix). The single case concerns itself with the uniqueness of the setting and quite often the motivation to select a particular case is based on a personal need to understand it (Truzzi 1974). In Stake's typology (1994, 1995) it would be called an intrinsic (as opposed to instrumental) case. A personal need to understand personal experience, trauma even, provide quite often the motivational basis for selection of certain cases: Examples include Dalton's deeply involved study about his employment company 1950, Currer's account of her experience in a typing pool 1992, Olesen 1990, Van Mannen's interest in the police 1991, Adler's long time involvement as a basketball coach 1981, Hayano's study of poker players 1976, and Waddington's personal account of a brewery strike 1994. The sociologist Mirza reports (1997) that the motivation for all her work derives from her own personal life story: "I use my experiences in my academic work, I name my pain. ... In doing that you expose yourself, write yourself into the text. Academics are not meant to do that." (p.23) Thus interest, involvement and curiosity are well established selection criteria for case studies and research projects. The difference in my chosen case, SBS, is that I am also employed as a senior lecturer at the same organisation, which still puzzles me after almost five years of full-time and two years of part time employment. Hayano (1979, 1982) coined the term "auto-ethnography", i.e. researching one's own culture. I shall use this to describe and reflect on the double-identity as researcher/employee. Recent contribution (van Maanen 1995, Reed-

Danahay 1997) explore the relationships between text, author involvement and research scene while taking an explicitly auto-ethnographic point of view.

From the point of view of the interpretive paradigm, the rigid subject-object dichotomy is denied, i.e. the researcher forms part of the social life she is studying. As such being a researcher and employee in the same organisation is just the final consequence of the resolution of this pseudo dichotomy subject-object. This requires a continuous and detailed exploration of the subject-object relationship, i.e. issues around auto-ethnography do arise and will be reflected upon throughout the thesis. Finally, this approach simply brings to the surface the dilemma that organisational ethnographers face throughout their research endeavours: what kind of relationship shall I have with those I research, which role shall I take in the field, should I avoid (and how) establishing too close a rapport with the other actors, is it possible to avoid bias? Thus the chosen research approach will enable me to deal more radically and openly with dilemmas that form part of any ethnographic study.

Utilising McAuley's (1985) model of the hermeneutic research process, commenting about the methodological choices of this study, I shall argue that I will nevertheless be able to poise myself between familiarity and strangeness, between participation and observation. The researcher will then constantly switch between "the object of study" to herself, to theory in order to understand the situation. This hermeneutic-spiritual form of knowing depends on understanding "the interplay between subjectivity and objectivity, the



ability to be at the same time involved and detached, self-aware and immersed" (McAuley 1985: 294). This requires " a high form of self-knowledge, an ability to identify in the self and momentarily hold still personal judgement and cultural signposts " (p. 295).

If hermeneutics are to be taken seriously the world outside the self is "investigated" as if one were a stranger to it and it is through self-awareness of the self (as researcher) that one becomes aware of others. Both in terms of my national and initial professional culture, I am foreign. The English language is not my native tongue and the process of writing is itself a self-conscious, alienating process. These factors do contribute to feelings of occasional alienation, which if treated reflectively, can be transcended into self-awareness and insights.

#### **1.2.3.1 Data Collection and Roles**

Therefore it is not only the content of the research that is important, almost more critical for this project will be keeping an account of the process of gathering insights by keeping a personal diary and scrap notes (Law 1994, Sanjek 1990). Thus, self-reflexivity will be applied throughout the thesis, ie the data gathering, thinking and writing stages. Still, I cannot deny the fact that life at SBS does not seem as strange and confusing as it did five years ago - although as I have argued earlier socialisation processes are ongoing and a recent change in role is making the familiar seem more unfamiliar. Nevertheless, the selection of organisational newcomers as one interview group will provide insights into cultural processes that I as a quasi-insider am no longer able to perceive. They will provide a mechanism to "bracket my assumptions" for me and be a mechanism to triangulate data,

which will be contrasted with the data gathered from long-serving employees. Also, document analysis will be used as yet another source of triangulation.

It could all too easily be argued that my role in this project must be in Gold's (1958) classic typology that of the "complete participant". Though this is certainly the role employed in many working hours, by applying the hermeneutic switching process, I shall fulfil various roles depending on circumstances in the field (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, Junker 1960). The only one excluded would be the complete observer - on the basis that all social research is interactive. However, permission to observe and sit in senior management meetings has been negotiated and in these circumstances my role will be shifting away from the complete-member researcher towards the peripheral-member researcher role (Adler and Adler 1987, 1994). Also, during the series of stakeholder interviews, my role as researcher will be much more "overt". However, the fact that I am researching issues within SBS has been announced publicly and comments and remarks by colleagues remind me of the fact, that they are aware of me being a researcher, i.e. I consider myself to be in an "overt" rather than "covert" role. With regards to the interviews, they shall be treated as "provoked accounts", because they will be continuous (i.e. no participant will only be interviewed once), open and extensive. They will provide a representation of people's perception of the organisation to enrich my own observations.

As such the qualitative interview is part of the ethnographic repertoire and does not create an artificial reality. Successive interviews will be used to decode the meaning of words



and concepts used repetitively. Details about methodological issues will be discussed in Chapter 3.

#### **1.2.4. The Insight (Theory)**

Despite the marriage of an organising theoretical framework with the hermeneutic/ethnographic method, the approach of this study is nevertheless inductive. Firstly, although it is often implicitly assumed that the researcher is "uncontaminated" from theory and allows the data "to hit" her. I do not agree with this "tabula rasa" assumptions, which is virtually impossible to achieve. Initially, I described my linguistic confusion in so far as terms such as "student" had been replaced with "customer". With hindsight and five years removed from this experience, I am now able to describe this confusion as caused by a 'metaphorical switching process drawing on different wider environmental discourses'. It becomes possible to theorise the experience in the light of structuralist (metaphorical switching) and post-structuralist (discourses) theories.

Nevertheless, the experience came first: New theoretical considerations are the outcome of induction. The explanation of signs as (social) phenomena is still grounded in observation and experience. In so far, my approach is related to the "grounded theory" thinking as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and as applied for example by Turner (1981) and Turner and Martin (1986). As such I will argue inductively throughout the thesis, rather than test hypotheses. The theorising in the final chapter will be anchored within the data, which will have been gained via participant observation, from the observation of face-to-face interaction, from semi-structured and unstructured interviews and from documentary

sources. In ethnographic terms theoretical completeness is reached when one can tell a story of the organisation that makes sense to authors and readers alike. In terms of the "theory" within the ethnographic context, trustworthiness replaces validity and generalizability. One can follow Guba's (1981) elaboration's about trustworthiness, which is in itself composed of four elements: truth value (credibility), applicability, consistency and neutrality. The role of the researcher is to increase the trustworthiness of the findings - which is only achievable by revealing the way they were obtained. Guba recommends that the researcher should stay extended periods in the field, collect insights from various sources, alternate between roles and seek feed-back from actors while in the field. Reverting back to the earlier discussion of the hermeneutic process of research, the principles to achieve trustworthiness follow the logic of the hermeneutic approach.

### **1.2.5. Writing It All up**

It might appear to be premature to address the writing up stage of the thesis within the introductory chapter. However, writing conventions (i.e. I have already commented upon how the "authorial voice" will be handled in this written account) need to be considered as part of the methodological approach, because the chosen representation style will link the "tale" with the "audience". The principle of reflexivity also embraces reflections on the rhetoric of the ethnographic account. It raises questions about author and authority, the representation of self and others (Atkinson 1990). The starting point of these issues is the acknowledgement that there is not a perfectly neutral way to represent the social world (Atkinson and Hammersley 1995). Contributions such as Clifford's and Marcus's (1986)



and Atkinson's (1990) raise the critical awareness about ethnographic textuality and Van Maanen (1988) explored the various modes of ethnographic writing. In Geertz's (1973) sense this thesis is "fiction", i.e. it is a shaped account according to some conventions and is a mere representation of accounts that have been interpreted by me, the researcher and presenter. Therefore, the theories that informed my preunderstanding, my relationship with colleagues etc., are made explicit rather than adhering to implicit writing conventions. In terms of Van Mannen's typology this thesis will be written in the spirit of the confessional tale, in which the omniscient tone of the realist tale gives way to a more cautious account of the field experience. No longer is the social world taken for granted as full of objective, observable facts. Fieldwork is an interpretive act, not an observation or descriptive one (Agar 1980a). "The textual organisation of the standard confessional tale may be of some help for fieldworkers who regard participant-observation as a metaphor best reformulated in hermeneutic terms: a dialectic between experience and interpretation" (Van Maanen 1988: 93). The norms as identified by Van Maanen (authors need to discuss their preunderstanding of the studied scene, their interest in that scene, their modes of entry, participation and presence, responses to their presence, relationships, modes of data collection, storage, retrieval, analysis) have been addressed in this chapter.

However, even if such a complex and sophisticated account is written, it leaves the problem of "textualization" (Ricoeur 1973). The final product of my efforts will be a written text. The process of writing renders formerly unwritten oral accounts into fixed classifiable data - only in this form does it yield to analysis. As Van Maanen (1988) puts

it: "The process of analysis is not dependent on the events themselves, but on a second-order, textualised, fieldworker dependent version of events. The problem here is how to crack open the textualization process itself." (pp. 95 - 96). More experimental forms of representation (Dwyer 1982, Krieger 1983, Watson 1995) do not only tell a tale, but treat content and representation as two intrinsically linked, equally important sides of the same coin. Atkinson and Hammersley (1995) talk of postmodern ethnography adopting a radically alternative attitude toward its textual character. Tyler (1986) rejects the term "representation" in favour of "evocation" of various accounts. These studies can be seen as attempts to create a rhetoric or "poetics" of ethnography. Van Maanen (1988) sums these attempts up under "impressionist tales", making the tale - a representation itself - subject to many forms of critical analysis. Though I hope to share some of the considerable textual self-consciousness of the impressionist authors, the area of this study is not the unusual, striking singular events of the impressionist tale, but the mundane every-day, organisational reality.

### **1.3. A Chapter-by-Chapter Overview**

While this current chapter serves as a scene-setter introducing the author and the project, the second chapter is part of the intellectual journey in so far as it reviews several studies that draw on linguistic frameworks in order to shed light on business issues/organisational processes. Simultaneous to working with the organisational setting or issue, they also apply theoretical frameworks such as structuralism, pragmatic analysis, speech act analysis, discourse analysis as organising mechanisms for data interpretation. In chapter



two the different espoused theoretical frameworks, their contribution as well as their methodological shortcomings are to be investigated. The evaluation of these studies will lead to a selection of theoretical frameworks as organising frameworks for this project, which provided a useful perspective for the analysis of organisational language and other semiotic sign systems. In chapter three research questions are formulated and an in-depth account of the research process itself, the hermeneutic approach and the involvement of the author is discussed. Chapters four, five and six comprise the body of the research itself. Chapter four is an application of Saussurian structuralism and its developments by Jakobson (1956) and Lodge (1977) to organisational talk and other sign systems. In this chapter the focus shifts on to organisational tropes, in particular metaphor and metonymy, as major sense-making mechanisms and the habitus of cultural knowledge. They provide the major perspective through which the data will be analysed in this as well as following chapters. In particular, the trope metonymy, the neglected trope of organisation theory, emerges as a major tool to assist in understanding meaning attribution. In chapter five the application of speech act philosophy (Austin 1962, Searle 1969) and pragmatics (Leech 1983, Levinson 1983 ) to organisational talk, texts and other semiotic systems focuses on sign systems as social performatives, i.e. it provides a supplementary perspective by underlining both the social constitutiveness and the action orientation of language. In chapter six a linguistically-driven discourse analysis as informed by the writings of Fairclough (1989, 1992) is conducted so as to deal with issues of creating consensual meaning through the strategies of ideology and hegemony. In all three research chapters the tropes metaphor and metonymy provide one of the major perspectives for the

investigation of talk, texts and artifacts. Chapter seven entails a discussion and evaluation of the main findings in the light of the research focus that was formulated in chapter three, a contextualisation of this study in the wider literature on organisational sense-making. Also, it will explicitly address in how far a contribution to knowledge has been made and in how far the induced theory can be applied to other settings. A personal postscript shall conclude the thesis.

#### **1.4. A Narrative of the Researched Organisation**

Although the researched organisation shares its history to some extent with other similar organisations, it shall be briefly outlined, including reflections on my entry into the organisation in 1989, i.e. the year in which Sheffield City Polytechnic (SCP) was awarded corporate status.

In 1956 - 1957 the first major development in the higher education sector happened outside the established universities. The creation of nine Colleges of Advanced Technologies (Robbins Report 1963) saw the expansion of higher education provision to reach a target of 17 per cent of school leavers by 1980-1981. Also, the establishment of the Council for National Academic Awards allowed institutions outside the universities to award degrees and diplomas over a wide range of subjects. In 1966 the White Paper 'A Plan for Polytechnics and other Colleges' stated that the subsequent expansion of higher education would be concentrated in a new kind of institution - the polytechnics. This sector would be "a strong and distinctive sector of higher education" to have "closer and



more direct links with industry, business and the professions.” In 1969, the authorities in Sheffield proposed to merge the College of Technology and the College of Art to form Sheffield City Polytechnic. The development over the following years mirrored the expansion of higher education in general in so far as the SCP grew both internally via opening up new fields of study and the widening of access, and externally through mergers to become one of Britain’s largest polytechnics by the 1980s.

The 1987 White paper and the 1988 Education Act severed all formal links with the Local Education Authorities and gave the polytechnics corporate status on 1 April 1989. SCP got a new streamlined Board of Governors with strengthened representation from industry, commerce and the professions.

In 1989 SCP was internally re-organised: “Underpinning the strategic plan is a new structure designed to make sure that the Polytechnic can act quickly and effectively within the fast moving higher education environment”. (Sheffield City Polytechnic: A History, 1991). The structure had moved away from the traditional faculty departmental structure to twelve schools, one of which was Sheffield Business School (SBS). In 1992, most polytechnics, including SCP, were awarded university status. SCP became Sheffield Hallam University (SHU). As institutions their allegiance has always tended to be closer to the vocational and professional field than that of their old university counterparts. The notion long held in English universities for example that the best form of training is intellectual and within a single discipline, has never been held as strongly by the

polytechnics, who have been much more active in designing multi-discipline courses with an applied focus. In terms of their structure the polytechnics inherited from their technical college days a more hierarchical design, more akin to traditional business structures (Middlehurst and Elton 1992), rather than to the cybernetic model of governance linked to the “old” universities (Birnbaum 1988 and 1989, Cohen and March 1986, Middlehurst and Elton 1992). However, with new university status, research activities began to figure as a priority on the agenda of the former polytechnics. It is within this triangular tension of hierarchical structures, collegial and egalitarian aspiration of the academics and the newly added research orientation that both the role and practice of teaching and research activities within the former polytechnics have had to change. Researchers in the higher education environment such as Middlehurst and Elton (1992) suggest that the more important research activities become, the less will hierarchical management structures be the best way to facilitate these practices, which need a more collegial culture associated with the cybernetic model of governance. It is within this general time of transition that this particular research project is located and tensions created by the change process are reflected in everyday activities and talk. Polytechnics such as the former SCP have to compete with “old” universities for research funds in order to avoid to become a “teaching only” institution. This tension is reflected in the substantive data as conflict between different commitments (eg teaching, researching).

In addition to the above changes, that most former polytechnics went through, SBS was affected by more upheaval. SBS as at the beginning of this project in late 1995 is not the



same organisation as SBS as in the final phase of the project in early 1998. SBS then comprised of undergraduate, postgraduate and postexperience business provisions, two research centres and was located on two main campuses. SBS today is a postgraduate school of study comprising the postgraduate provision of three schools (SBS, Financial Studies and Law, Computing and Management Science), one research centre and is located within the Business and Information Technology Centre (BITC) in the City Centre. At the time of writing, a second round of restructuring is being discussed, though the results of this will not be incorporated into the thesis.

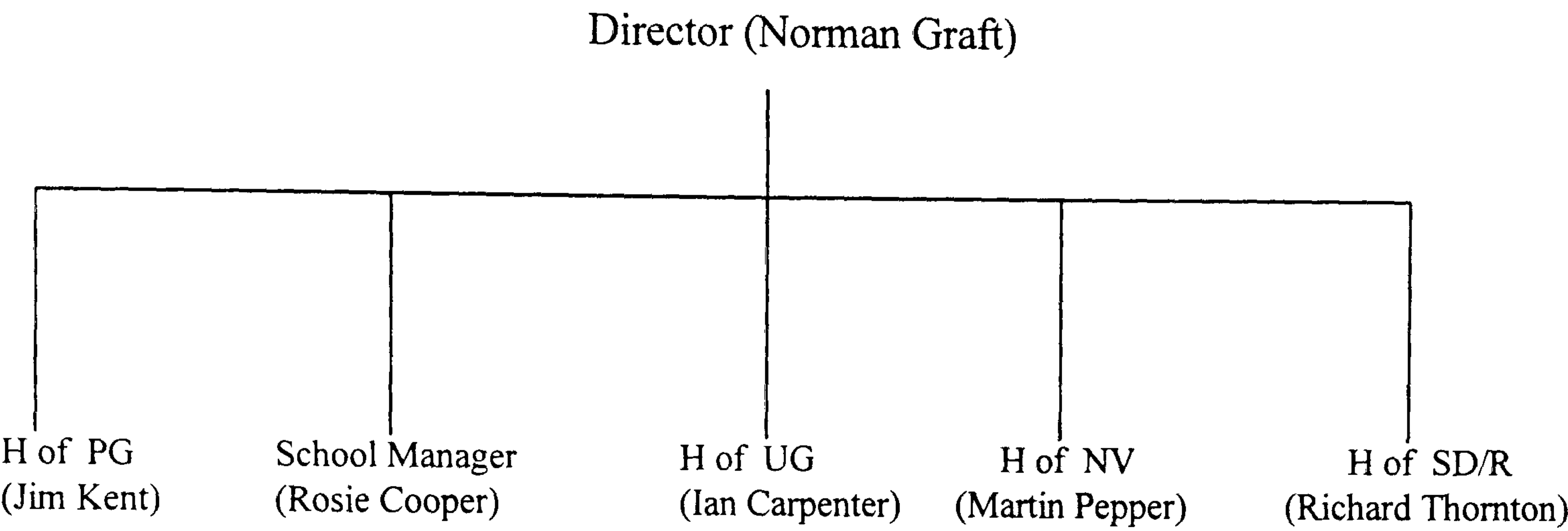
How deep the changes from old SBS to new SBS were, can be demonstrated by briefly reflecting the changes in the school's senior decision-making body, the executive group - although this thesis will not relate and interpret the change experience from the point of view of management. In 1995 the executive group comprised the Director, a School Manager, Head of Postgraduate Programmes, Head of Undergraduate Programmes, Head of Staff Development (also responsible for Research), Head of New Ventures. By approximately mid 1996 a new Head of Undergraduate Programmes had been appointed with additional responsibility for Staff Development and the former Head of Staff Development had left the group. A couple of months later the Director had taken early retirement and the "new" Head of Undergraduate Programmes had become acting Director. New appointments to the executive were a new Head of Undergraduate Programmes as well as the advisor to Head of Staffing (this role remained with the now acting Director). The Head of New Ventures, the Head of Postgraduate Programmes and

the School Manager remained. The Head of one of the Research Centre joint meetings occasionally, as did other people, such as the operations manager for the move of the school to the new location. Currently, the new SBM (School of Business and Management) provides undergraduate provision for business and business-related courses. The then acting Director of SBS is now the acting Director of SBM. In addition, there are five Head of Divisions, a Head of Undergraduate Programmes (changes in personnel have already happened with regard to this position), Head of Quality, all of which constitute the executive group. The new SBS has an acting Director, formerly uninvolved in the executive, the Head of Collaborative Programmes (formerly New Ventures), a Head of specialist Master programmes (formerly Advisor to Head of Staffing), a Head of generalist Masters programmes, a Head of Quality, a Head of Marketing.

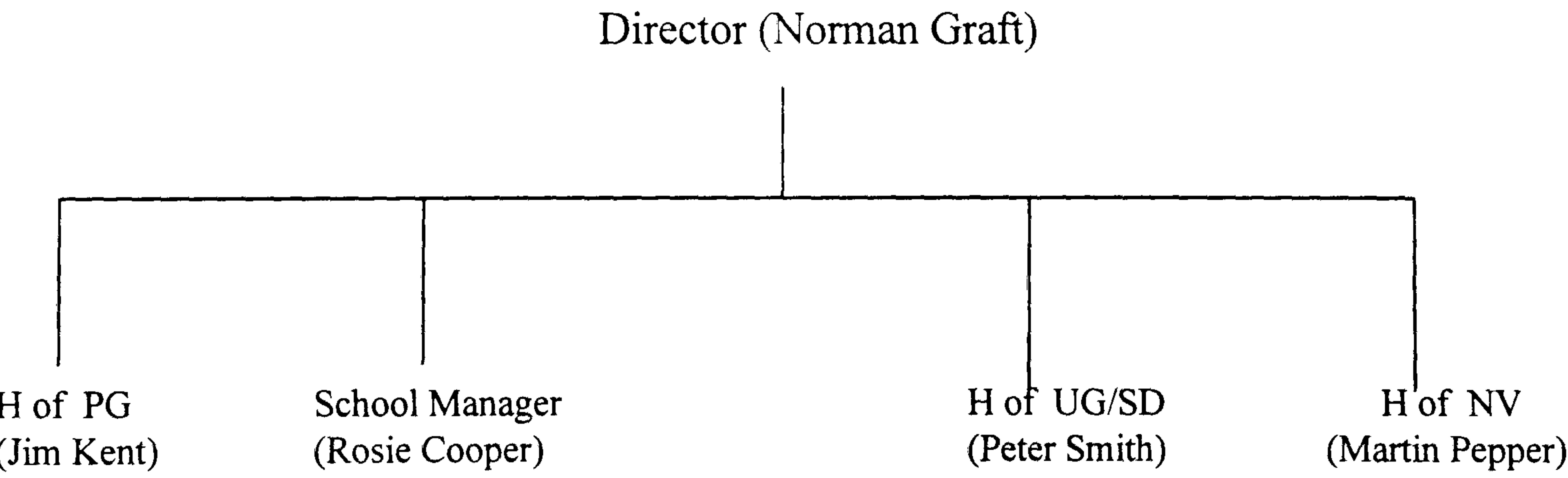
For purposes of providing guidance, a brief overview over the composition of SBS's executive group(s) during the research project as well as a brief outline of its constituents is given. This shall not draw inappropriate attention to this management group, but renders it easier for the reader to follow the account. Furthermore, the changes in this group reflect to some extent the changes that occurred during 1996 and 1997.



“Old” SBS (as from approximately 1990 to 1996)

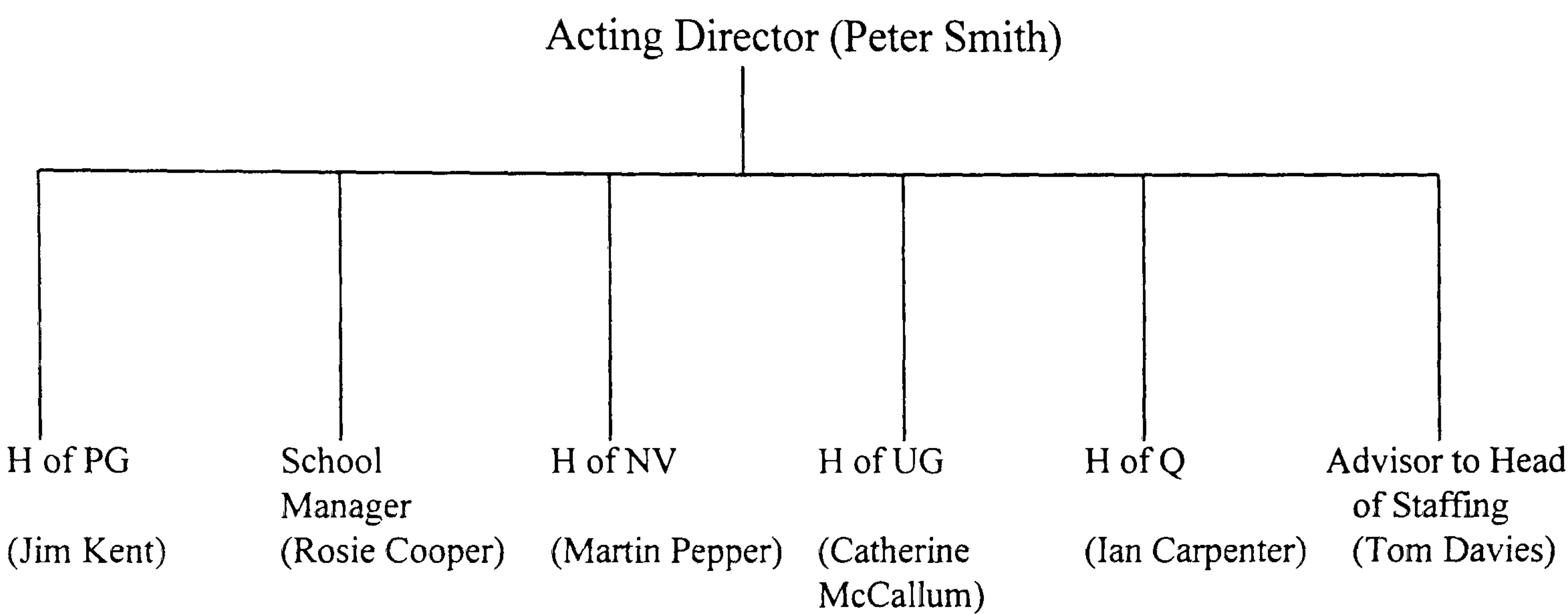


Norman Graft arranged for the roles of HoUG programmes and Head of Staff Development and Research to be drawn together into one role: Head of UG and Staffing. It was filled by Peter Smith, who was recruited as an external candidate. The Head of Undergraduate Programmes became the Head of Quality (in a non-executive position), the Head of Staff Development and Research was allocated a (non-executive) mentor role.



In early summer 1997 the Director, Norman Graft, took early retirement under the Special Pensions Enhanced Education Scheme. Peter Smith took over as acting Director and appointed Catherine McCallum as Head of Undergraduate Programmes, Tom Davies as

Advisor to the Head of Staffing (ie Peter Smith) to the executive group and re-established Ian Carpenter as Head of Quality into the executive group.



During the weeks from late spring/early summer 1997 to the actual move into the new building in August 1997 and the foundation of “new” SBS and SBM (School of Business and Management, comprising undergraduate programmes), various colleagues attended the meetings of the executive group (eg operations manager, Head of Change Management Research Centre, Marketing Professor, subject leaders) without being permanent members. Also, the influence of some members decreased or increased, sometimes within a very short time span. The period of “vacillation” will be analysed in more detail in chapter six. Following the establishment of separate schools, new executive groups were formulated. These are not outlined here, because no meetings of these groups were observed.

Some characters that form part of the narrative are:



Ian Carpenter: a Senior Academic Postholder, considered a good colleague, who found himself a member of the executive as Head of Undergraduate Programmes. As Head of Quality, he had both an executive and a non-executive function. Currently, Ian is acting as Head of Undergraduate Programmes, after Catherine McCallum resigned.

Rosie Cooper: the School's most senior administrator, who worked closely with Norman Graft, the Director, in particular regarding budgeting issues and resource allocation. Currently, she holds another senior administrative function providing management support across several schools.

Tom Davies: formerly a course and subject leader, Tom is an ambitious achiever with union affiliations and a hands-on management style. He took an active interest during the "change" period and was made part of the executive group by Peter Smith. He is currently Head of specialist Master programmes of SBS.

Norman Graft: is the founder figure and Director of SBS until his retirement in summer 1997. He is currently working as a management consultant and as Visiting Professor to SBS.

Jim Kent: is a Senior Academic Postholder and Head of Postgraduate Programmes. Having great intellectual ability and acumen, he combines a managerial and researcher

role. Although keeping his position in the executive, he lost influence and is currently a Head of Division.

Catherine McCallum: is considered to be a “highflyer” with a reputation for competence and intelligence, who has successfully managed programmes as well as gained a PhD. She is promoted to Principal Lecturer as Head of Cycle one (year one programmes) and quickly promoted into the executive by Peter Smith as Head of Undergraduate Programmes. Catherine keeps this position after the split between SBS and SBM, but has recently resigned from this position.

Martin Pepper: a Senior Academic Postholder in charge of supporting innovative projects and generate new strategic opportunities. He survived the change period with his position and influence intact and is currently Head of Collaborative Programmes in SBS.

Peter Smith: a Senior Academic Postholder, who used to work for SBS in its early years to become Head of Department at another university. Following a personal invitation, he applied for and was appointed as Head of Undergraduate Programmes and Staff Development under Norman Graft. Peter became acting Director of SBS after Norman Graft’s retirement and is currently acting Director of SBM.

Richard Thornton: a Professor and Senior Academic Postholder is Head of Staff Development and Research. An outspoken personality, he never agreed with either the



abandonment of the faculty structure (where he was a Head of Department) and the subsequent establishment of SBS.

These changes in roles and personnel reflect the overall upheaval during this time. In particular, the change of atmosphere was remarkable and happened within a span of approximately three months: I went into hospital in November 1996 to return to work in February 1997. Even this short period of absence served as a “strange- making” mechanism, because on my return the topics that were discussed in meetings and outside had changed: Talk about the graduate school occurred as a new possibility, merger talk (with one particular school) were in the centre of talk for a short period, the consequences of restructuring, who was in or out of favour, the pending move to the new site in the City Centre informed all discussions. As in my previous entry and entry shock (Louis 1980) experience, the difference in talk struck me as important and confirmed that experiences are reflected as much as created by language.

### **1.5. Of Elephants and Elephants' Cells**

In this first chapter my aim was to establish the rationale for the selection of the topic area and research scene and my involvement in it. Reflections on paradigmatic preference as researcher impact on the methodological approach that has been chosen were discussed. Equally, an appreciation of micro-settings as worthy of serious analysis (Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel 1981), rather than macro issues, led to the decision to concentrate on one case in detail and over time, rather than to work on a macro level of analysis. The chosen case is

both the employment organisation and the research scene. Therefore the trustworthiness of the final written account will be achieved by addressing issues of auto-ethnography throughout the text, including a high level of self-reflexivity and accuracy in reporting it.

Finally, Morgan (1986) used the "elephant" metaphor to make the point about how difficult it is to study organisations. This metaphor allows me to address the reductionist danger that is potentially inherent in this particular study. Isn't it too introspect, too much concerned with its own textuality, privileging the rhetorical over the "rational" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1994, Hammersley 1993)? One must remember that any decision about what to research and how to research it is reductionist in nature. One elephant (organisation) can be studied as one individual animal, in terms of its social relations with other elephants, as a herd of animals in their particular environmental setting; even one cell of the elephant might be put under the microscope and investigated. Whatever the chosen topic, whatever the chosen research strategy, opportunity costs will have to be paid as well as advantages will be gained. Exploring an issue on a micro level requires a different approach and will provide different findings than exploring the same issue on a meso or macro level. At no time is it denied that there are linkages and by embedding this case within the social and political contexts of its time, any reproaches of solipsism are refuted. A choice to explore the usage of language and the creation of meaning in one organisation has been made and appropriate research strategies have been chosen.



## **Chapter 2   Linguistics and Organisation Studies: Forming a Pre-understanding**

The pre-understanding for this thesis derives from my own, the author's, involvement in the research scene, which was outlined in chapter one. Secondly, pre-understanding is also formed by reading and reviewing the literature in the area of organisation studies-cum-linguistics. In this chapter several studies that informed my thinking about language and language use in organisational settings are discussed with a view to extrapolate from them a framework within which the accumulated data can be organised and interpreted.

### **2.1.    Sense-Making and Common-Sense in Organisations**

The studies that inform my pre-understanding were read at an early stage of the research process. They are briefly described and discussed. By no means do they constitute a comprehensive review of the available literature. Studies, for example, utilising a metaphorical framework to organisational settings are included in this thesis, but at a later stage. The discussed studies in this chapter were selected during a process of increasingly focused reading, with each of the studies contributing to both my understanding how linguistic frameworks can be applied to organisational settings as well as an appreciation of the limitation of each framework. Within the tradition of “*verstehen*” the studies determined the formulation of the perspective through which data is analysed. It is for this reason that they need to be integrated into the written account (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995).

Sense-making processes have, of course, been explored by organisational researchers (e.g. Boden 1994, Boje 1991, Czarniawska 1997, Taylor 1993). Weick (1995) in a recent contribution identifies the major attributes of sense-making, while providing a

historical overview over studies that concern themselves with the intricacies of sense-making processes : “Both organizations and sense-making processes are cut from the same cloth. To organise is to impose order, counteract deviations, simplify and connect, and the same holds true when people try to make sense.” (p. 82).

By applying linguistic frameworks, these processes of ordering, connecting, simplifying and so on shall be investigated as to better understand the role of language in them.

A study concerning itself with meaning and sense-making in everyday life as legitimate for organisational enquiry cannot but acknowledge the intellectual debt it owes to ethnomethodological approaches. Ethnomethodology focuses upon everyday life as a skilled accomplishment, and upon methods which people use for ‘producing it’ (Garfinkel 1967). Also, ethnomethodological thinking is anchored “in its studies, and tying the studies to materials, declining to discuss principled or programmatic matters in an abstract way.” (Sharrock and Anderson 1986:x), which is the approach espoused in this thesis. Whereas works of seminal thinkers such as Habermas and Foucault, though influential in their impact on organisational researchers (Burrell, 1988, 1994) fail to ground their theorising in actual data. With regard to this project this approach is not emulated, but theorising is indeed grounded in data. The insights of Habermas and Foucault are acknowledged at relevant sections in the thesis.

The commonality of the ethnomethodological approach and the approach espoused in this thesis lies in the ‘ethno’ prefix. Garfinkel (1974:16) explains ‘ethno’ as: “Ethno



seems to refer, somehow or other, to the availability to a member of common-sense knowledge of his society as common-sense knowledge of the ‘whatever’.” The “whatever” is the “ordinary arrangement of a set of located practices.”(p.17). In this thesis the construction and constitution of (common) sensical knowledge is investigated not so much via Conversation Analysis (Sacks, Schlegoff and Jefferson 1974, Pomerantz and Fehr 1997) as via the application of different linguistic frameworks to organisational talk and other sign systems.

## **2.2. Linguistic Structuralism and Organisational Analysis**

The studies that were selected comprise Bouissac’s (1976) *Circus and Culture*, Barley’s (1983) *Semiotics and the Study of Occupational and Organizational Cultures*, Manning’s (1987) *Semiotics and Fieldwork*, Barley, Meyer and Gash’s (1988) *Cultures of Culture. Academics, Practitioners and the Pragmatics of Normative Control*, Fiol’s (1989) *A Semiotic Approach to Corporate Language. Organizational Boundaries and Joint Venturing*. In total, an analysis of these studies shows how linguistic structuralism can indeed be applied to understand sense-making processes, while simultaneously identifying inherent weaknesses of this approach.

Taking their clue from the works of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 - 1913) (1916), the studies view language (and organisations) as a system with its basic unit being the sign. Value and meaning is derived from a relationship of signs in the whole system and the

relationship of signifier and signified within one sign. Meaning is viewed as systemic, relational and conventional.

Bouissac (1976), for example, conceptualises the circus as a specific language, which is successfully decoded by the audience. Barley (1983) investigates the metaphorical and metonymical relationships between signs (the concepts of which are taken from Jakobson's (1956) development of Saussurian structuralism) as creating cultural knowledge and understanding in a funeral parlour. Manning (1987) explicitly assumes a middle position between the "subjectivist and the objectivist" (p.10) and introduces the idea of semiosis (change of meaning over time) as to deal with the instability and volition of meaning. Drawing on examples taken from his work in two police departments he shows how meaning is changed via interpretation of messages by language users. While Manning can be positioned nearer a "language-as-action-position", Barley, Meyer and Gash's (1988) study relies on the analysis of texts to investigate the dialectics of influence between subcultures (academics and practitioners) by coding texts for certain indicators of either academic or practitioner discourse. Although partially applying the terminology of pragmatics, the way meaning is allocated to indicators renders the spirit of this study structuralist. Finally, Fiol's (1989) analysis of narrative structure (Greimas 1966) of letters written by CEOs, read the narrative as a sign system, conveying meaning. Finally, Fiol organises the organisational boundaries in a semiotic square of oppositional structures.



In sum, when applying structuralist ideas to organisational settings processes of signification are shown to be arbitrary, conventionally determined and system-bound: “In language there are only differences.” (Saussure 1966: 118). In particular Bouissac’s (1976), Fiol’s (1989), and Barely, Meyer and Gash’s (1988) studies show how encoding and decoding processes are activated within narrative structures. I consider Barley’s (1983) study to be seminal in so far as it is an early and isolated attempt to apply the tropes metaphor and metonymy to organisational settings and define how they work together as to create meaning and cultural understanding. Manning (1987) spans a bridge between a pure structuralist application and language-as-social- action view, providing evidence that several frameworks can be applied as to shed light on organisational processes.

Following Barthes’ (1967) thinking on ‘language’ and ‘parole’: “Language and speech: each of these two terms of course achieves its full definition only in the dialectical process which unites one to another: there is no language without speech, and no speech outside language. (...) Language and speech are therefore in a relation of reciprocal comprehensiveness.” (pp. 15 - 16), the application of linguistic structuralism to organisational talk and artifacts will provide the focus to explore meaning as linked to signs and as located in the relationships of signs in the system.

Structuralism (for a more detailed outline of the theory and its impact see Culler 1976, Gadet 1986, Hawkes 1977, Lodge 1988 and 1995, Koerner 1973) has been described as

a “one generation phenomenon” (Hughes and Sharrock 1986:101) due to its inherent weaknesses: “the work of later scholars such as Derrida and to a lesser extent, Foucault, is post-structuralist in that it reveals the inability of the method to satisfy the ambitions set for it.” (p.101). These weaknesses can be summarised as the elimination of material origins, concentration on abstracts, rationalisation, eradication of individuals and human agency and finally its denial of history and inability to account for change. With regard to organisational studies these concerns have been theorised by Manning (1985, 1987) and from a linguistic point of view by Haidu (1982) and Finlay-Pelinski (1982). Manning sums up the argument as: “Semiotic structuralism can’t explain system change.” (1985:107).

Structuralist approaches claim to be objective, “presenting universal knowledge, which is not grounded in particular, individual, historically given subjectivities.” (Hughes and Sharrock 1986:102). The claim for objectivism and universality is echoed in the discussed studies and in how the authorial voice is handled. Not one of the authors gives an account of their involvement in the scene of study. Bouissac (1976), for example, as the owner of the circus, can be assumed to be deeply committed to the circus. Barely (1983) and Manning (1987) conducted their field studies in a funeral home, a nuclear power station and police departments respectively, yet nothing of the sparkle or excitement comes across to the reader. Barley, Meyer and Gash (1988) and Fiol (1989) themselves critique their own detached work as wanting in so far as neither of them got involved in the field (e.g. by interviewing). Yet, the ‘truth’ of their interpretations is



presented in neat diagrams as universal, objective and true. The accounts are ‘innocent’ in so far as the authority of the omniscient author is upheld and the analysis/interpretation is presented as the authoritative account of the expert. Manning is the only one of these authors, who makes this explicit: “less and less interest in the study of emotion, sentiment and the messy particulars of life as a sociological domain.” (1987:7).

### **2.3. Language as Action in Organisational Analysis**

In contrast to the structuralist studies the following examples are conducive to understanding how language acts as a (social) performative in organisational settings. The selected studies comprise Silverman and Jones’ (1976) *Organisational Work. The Language of Grading. The Grading of Language*, Czarniawska-Joerges’s (1988) *To Coin a Phrase. On Organisational Talk, Organisational Control and Management Consulting*, Bate’s (1990) *Using the Culture Concept in an Organisation Development Setting*, Alvesson’s (1994a) *Talking in Organisations. Managing Identity and Impression in an Advertising Agency*, and Watson’s (1995) *Rhetoric, Discourse and Argument in Organisational Sense-Making. A Reflexive Tale*.

Taking their clues from different theoreticians, all studies concern themselves with language use in an everyday setting. Language is seen as a social performative (Austin 1962, Searle 1969, 1979) with the emphasis of these studies on ‘parole’: Language in use. Complementing a structuralist approach, these studies ask the question “What does

language do?”. A question inspired by the works of ordinary language philosophers such as Austin’s (1962) *How to do things with words* and Searle’s (1969, 1979) theorising on speech acts and their classification. Their theorising provides a tool to explain the dialectics between talk and action, which also re-introduces the human actor into the analysis.

Silverman and Jones (1976) for example when researching the selection and careers of junior administrative staff at a large public sector organisation in the UK, investigate the tacit knowledge inherent in organisational structures and routines. They show how organisational competence is defined by the individual’s ability to refer to a base of shared notions of understanding, which is enacted in the organisational setting itself (e.g. during interviews). Czarniawska-Joerges (1988) defines talk as social action and critically investigates the role of management consultants as “merchants of meaning”. They supply three devices (labels, metaphors, platitudes) in order to create order and meaning. Similarly, Bate’s (1990) study on British Rail is written from the point of view of the consultant, who focuses on language as “the primary cultural form of any society or organisation” (p.90). The process of making the clients think ‘culturally’ about their own situation by fitting language label to certain organisational practices is viewed as a precondition to achieve cultural change. Talk as data is the focus of Alvesson’s (1994) study is set in a marketing agency. It investigates the management of identities and impressions via linguistic and symbolic means. Alvesson shows how language plays an active part in achieving identity by enabling the advertising



professionals to differentiate themselves from their clients. His study sits on a borderline position between a “language-as-(social)-action framework and critical discourse analysis in so far as he integrates the macro base (capitalist economy) into the analysis and links it to the micro base (the organisational setting). Although all of these studies acknowledge the presence of an authorial voice, it is in particular Watson (1995) who shows both the performance of managerial work as well as the writing of articles for academic journals as exercises in rhetoric. Watson explores the rhetorical devices that are activated when a work matter is considered and conceptualises it as mainly an act of self-persuasion (see also Watson 1994). The authorial voice in this study is integrated into the analysis itself, while authors such as Czarniawska-Joerges (1988) focus their attention on developing a critical perspective, which show the potential of language to be used to exercise control.

Given the shortcomings of a pure structuralist analysis, a perspective that views language as parole and having performative potential needs to supplement the analysis of the organisation as a sign system. Thus a more comprehensive model that endeavours to explain sense-making processes can be built. Finally, a critical element, investigating language and the exercise of control needs to be added.

#### **2.4. Language, Critical Understanding and Organisational Analysis**

The studies that were selected comprise Knight’s and Morgan’s (1991) *Corporate Strategy, Organisations and Subjectivity: a Critique*, Morgan’s (1992) *Marketing*

*Discourse and Practice, Towards a Critical Analysis*, Forester's (1992) *Critical Ethnography. On Fieldwork in a Habermasian Way* and Fairclough's (1993) *Critical Discourse Analysis and the Marketization of Public Discourse: The Universities*.

It is perhaps impossible to conduct a discourse analysis without acknowledging the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault's work, though difficult to summarise, provides the bedrock from which many of the ideas of these studies derive. His work on "archaeology" (1972) provides the two main insights that discourse is actively constituting society on various dimensions and secondly, the emphasis on the interdependency of the discourse practices of societies and institutions. In his later work, e.g. *Discipline and Punish* (1979), discourse is secondary to a system of power. Individuals are able to constitute or reconstitute their subjectivity, i.e. derive a meaningful definition of what they are and do within the parameters of discourses. Knights and Morgan (1991) and Morgan (1992), for example, show how individuals do both, they participate in and are constituted by the prevalent discourse of their time. By providing an alternative, genealogical interpretation of 'corporate strategy' Knights and Morgan show how various forces and circumstances lead to the emergence of one particular discourse and how it comes to be accepted as "normal". Similarly, Morgan (1992) shows the marketing discourse as informed by the "freedom for the consumer" metaphor, which promotes a world of equal choice for all, while reproducing inequalities of power and wealth. Forester (1992) draws on speech act theory, but adds a critical stance by concentrating his analysis on "relations of power and hegemony and



their contingencies.” (p.47). Thus, seemingly ‘parochial’ mundane utterances are shown as significant in reproducing patterns of power. This study marries speech-act-theory/pragmatics with critical analysis as to investigate the nature of normative claims. Finally, Fairclough conducts a critical discourse analysis set in a university environment. Fairclough synthesises recent insights of social theory and combines them with a linguistic approach to investigation (this approach is specified in more detail in Fairclough’s publications of 1989 and 1992). Although integrating Foucault’s work in his analysis, he is also highly critical of it as lacking in practical usability and employing a deterministic stance: “It is rather in the totality of his work and in the major analysis, the dominant impression is one of people being helplessly subjected to immovable systems of power.” (1992:57). In the 1993 study Fairclough investigates instances of self-promotion, advertisements, programme materials and prospectuses to show how these processes as well as artifacts are increasingly commodified and used as marketing tools in late capitalist society.

The briefly reviewed studies constitute attempts to link micro organisational practices and/or individual motivation to the social and cultural macro-structures. They are in this respect a development of the studies that applied speech-act or pragmatic frameworks. Pragmatics (Leech 1983, Levinson 1983), too, arises from the concept of language as used by “real, live people, who use language for their own purposes and within their limitations and affordances.” (Mey 1993: 5) within any given context. However, unlike critical discourse analysis neither speech-act-theory nor pragmatics

anchor the language user in her wider societal environment. It is for this reason that data is to be investigated from a critical discursive point of view, too.

The authorial voice in the studies is acknowledged in so far as authors position themselves in a certain tradition, thus rendering the reader aware of the authorial existence. The author as an integrated voice figures only in Fairclough's (1993) writing in so far as he examines a self-promotional activity as an example how the discursive environment informs how he constitutes himself as an individual academic.

## **2.5. Discussion**

The studies concern themselves with sense-making processes and meaning creation in organisational settings. They do so by applying linguistic frameworks. The challenge for this project is to contribute an approach to the analysis of sense-making processes that combines the insights of linguistic structuralism, speech-act-theory and critical discourse analysis. The analysis within the different perspectives will be conducted in chapters four, five and six. Also, issues around the management of the authorial voice arise. The authors of the discussed studies can be placed on a continuum. The extremes of which are marked by the opposition of innocent/authoritative and reflexive/aware. Reflexivity is the immediate critical consciousness of what one is doing or thinking. A reflexive account makes the involvement of the author in the research scene explicit and in doing so enables the reader to better evaluate the written account. An innocent account sustains the authority of the author and is often presented as an account written



by an expert. Bouissac's (1976) and Watson's (1995) studies are examples of the extremes on the continuum. With regard to this thesis it will be written in a reflexive way in which the author's voice becomes part of the analytic endeavour (Woolgar 1988). Engaging in a reflexive mode of researching and writing is part of working within the interpretive paradigm (Burrell and Morgan 1979). The sometimes contradictory assumptions of the theories that constitute the 'organising framework' (e.g. structuralist approach upholds the tradition of the 'grand narrative' in Lyotard's (1984) sense; the speech-act framework is related to social constructivism and the critical discourse analysis as based on Fairclough is positioned in the radical humanist paradigm) are synthesised within the logic of "verstehen": Methodological tools are drawn on in the light of whether they can contribute to "verstehen" or not.

To conclude, drawing on established research studies three organising frameworks within which data is to be analysed have been identified. The analysis of data is to be conducted within the tradition of "verstehen" and the interpretive paradigm. It is to be shown whether this approach can contribute to the current understanding of language and language use in organisational settings.

## **Chapter 3    Accounting for Research Questions, Frameworks and Techniques**

While chapter one provided a general introduction into the broad theme and setting of this project, chapter two investigated several studies, which applied different linguistic organising frameworks to organisational issues or settings. In this chapter, an account of the espoused philosophical approach, the research strategy and techniques are provided, with particular reference to the auto-ethnographic situation and author involvement. Also, the research focus is articulated.

### **3.1. Asking Research Questions**

In order to develop a research focus and to receive some answers, one has to ask questions. Within the spirit of this thesis, these questions were not clear cut at its beginning, but emerged after a process of reflecting, reading and writing about organisational sense-making and linguistic processes in organisational settings. A "Look back in Reflection" to chapters one and two shall be the way to crystallise implicit questions.

Chapter one dealt with my preconceptions, paradigmatic orientation, motivational drive and described the topic area of this thesis in terms of my own experience of "linguistic confusion". Chapter two explored various studies that applied linguistic theories to organisational settings and sense making processes. As such, I consider it to be established that linguistic frameworks may indeed be helpful in shedding light on processes in and around organisations. However, as the critical reflection revealed, this application is not unproblematic. The analytic potency of these approaches may be undermined by an uncritical appropriation of theories, which draw on different meta-



theoretical assumptions. In studies embracing a hard structuralist framework, issues around author involvement and the trustworthiness of their accounts were raised. In studies applying the frameworks associated with poststructuralism, the authorial voices became more explicit and the textuality of the text raised issues about the as such represented reality.

The research focus therefore is: To investigate sense-making and meaning creating processes within one organisational setting by utilising various linguistic organising frameworks while upholding the auto-ethnographic tradition. In doing so, a methodology to shed light on meaning creation and sense-making processes will be developed.

Positioning myself in a fieldwork tradition and its focus on "thick description" (Geertz 1973), might pose the question 'why impose an analytical framework at all', 'why not let the data speak for itself'? The reasons for using linguistic theories as analytic tools are twofold. Firstly, for a study concerning itself with language as the subject matter, linguistic frameworks of analysis are appropriate. Also, within the auto-ethnographic scenario, analytic tools will function as a balancing mechanism: facilitating reflective detachment and distinctiveness from the field. The decision to use an analytic framework follows Manning's argument (1987) that fieldwork tradition and semiotics can be drawn together to form a perspective shift, resulting in better understanding.

As outlined in chapter two, the organising framework embraces different linguistic traditions in order to explore sense making and meaning from a variety of theoretical perspectives: Meaning as created within the system, meaning as created and enacted in talk by human agents. Meaning as being subject to human interest and ideological pursuit. The process of investigating data will nevertheless be performed from the point of view of hermeneutics and the interpretative paradigm.

### **3.2. Hermeneutics, Ethnography and Author Involvement**

In origin, Hermeneutics is the interpretation of texts in order to re-establish their “true” meaning (Bauman 1978, Hughes and Sharrock 1986). However, the principle of ‘Auslegung’ (interpretation) can be transferred beyond a mere critique of texts to embrace the endeavour to interpret meaning in social life. If the method of Hermeneutics is interpretation, how does one know that any interpretation is the correct one? Within the parameters of this thesis, I will accept an interpretation if it can provide a satisfactory explanation for the initial “puzzlement”, i.e. the linguistic confusion. However, there is no guarantee of truth or universality. As Hughes and Sharrock put it, when discussing Dilthey’s work (1986: 69): “ Our knowledge of human life can only be gained through a hermeneutical interpretive procedure based upon the possibility of ‘imaginatively recreating’ the experience of others.”, which is after all what ethnography endeavours to do. Ethnography entails “an analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal description and explanations...” (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994:248). The



activity of interpretation being conducted by the researcher, whose participation in the research scene needs to be made explicit. Participant observation is the “method of ethnography, so it could be argued” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983), a mode of “being-in-the-world”, where the researcher draws on her own experience and cultural knowledge, and in the process of doing so reaches understanding. As Hunt (1989) argues the self is the key fieldwork tool and the role of self-understanding is critical to well executed fieldwork. The researcher’s meaning world and the researched meaning world complement each in a dialectic relationship. Thus, the assumption of researcher-researched dualism is not to be upheld in view of the interpretive-hermeneutic nature of the research endeavour. From this point of view fieldwork is, in part, the discovery of the self through the detour of the other (Ricoeur 1970: 42 in Hunt 1989).

Although this project involves the authorial self itself, it will not become a life history analysis (Musson 1998) or be used to interpret my own biography (Denzin 1989), rather as Woolgar (1988:23) states “she [the researcher - S.T.] produces knowledge claims about the production of knowledge claims; she aims to explain how explanation is done, to understand how understanding is produced, and so on. We would thus expect that self-reference in the sociology of scientific knowledge would be of an immediate kind, occurring in the course of the research itself.” He calls this “constitutive reflexivity”, where the author constitutes and participates in the part of the reality she investigates. How will this hermeneutic modus of understanding be operationalised? An example taken from the research process and which proved to be of importance for later theorising



is used to illustrate this point: After two years of full-time employment I applied for and was appointed as a course leader for a postgraduate course in 1995. The postgraduate programmes were then located on the Totley Campus, a rural campus situated on the verge of town, approximately six miles away from the City Centre where the undergraduate programmes were located in a building called Dyson House. My appointment entailed a change in my office location from Dyson to Totley. Initially, I was surprised by the number of sarcastic comments my move provoked amongst “Dyson staff”. As a course leader I found myself being resocialised within the meaning world of the Totley Campus, which was different from that of the City Centre location. I experienced very strongly the “Totley-Dyson” divide, which was confirmed by the data I collected about the importance of location. My own involvement in the research scene made me notice the differences in the modes-of-being on the two different sites. However, at this point in time, the level of my involvement can be characterised as “brute” experience. While reading the studies discussed in chapter two, the process of reflection began. In particular Barley’s (1983) study on the metonymical/metaphorical arrangement in a funeral parlour contributed to an emergence of “sense” in so far as it drew my attention to the importance of the structural/geographical arrangements as cultural meaning systems. Later on in this process of experiencing, reflecting and after having read in particular Jakobson (1956), and Lodge (1977), I started theorising my experience and the collected data in a much more complex framework comprising structuralism, speech acting and discursive practices, which allowed me to switch between myself, the research scene and its particular geographical arrangement, how it was perceived and



finally the organizing frameworks to theorize geographical arrangements as metonymical structure which are metaphorically interpreted within the parameters of certain discourses. As such “confusion” led to understanding and theorising. In doing so a hermeneutic cycle was completed: My experience of the physical change in location was highly symbolic within the meaning system of the school. My confusion can partly be explained by my being unaware of the symbolism inherent in this move.

### **3.3. Theory Building from One Case**

The evaluation criteria for this thesis was described as trustworthiness (Guba 1981), comprising credibility, applicability, consistency and neutrality, which are achieved by collective insights. I have accounted for how this was operationalised in the research process in chapters one and this chapter in particular and generally throughout the thesis. The research process was aligned to the hermeneutic tradition and its emphasis on ‘Verstehen’ (understanding) and ‘Auslegung’ (interpretation). Furthermore, I believe the ‘story’ of the case organisation to be unique in terms of the individual actors, their talk and the sense-making processes they engage in. Notwithstanding uniqueness, a “tropological model” will be developed from combining organising frameworks with participant observation which can be generalised in so far as it can be applied to other organisational settings. This, of course, suggests an almost “positivist view of research. That is, the process is directed toward the development of testable hypotheses and theory which are generalizable across settings.” (Eisenhardt 1989:546).

Indeed, a number of well known case studies have resulted in considerable theoretical advances (Selznik 1949, Jacques 1956, Dalton 1959, Kanter 1988), while applying different research strategies. Gill (1994) sums up the debate about the contribution of case studies to theory building by contrasting Eisenhardt's position (1989, 1991) of better, measurable constructs with a position emphasising better, deeper stories. With regard to this project, I am taking a middle position, which combined ethnography with theoretical frameworks to produce the new theoretical insights of the tropological model. While the setting and the people in the case are unique, the method of how to explore their meaning worlds can be transferred to other settings.

### **3.4. Research Techniques**

Within the overall research paradigm and strategy a number of research techniques were utilized. The following gives an account of how they were operationalised.

#### **Fieldnotes**

I started keeping a note book in October 1995. Initially, it was used to record scraps of conversation or observations that I made during my working hours. Quite quickly its purpose expanded and it became a work diary, in which I also noted my state of mind, including emotions. For example, in the early stages of this project, a valued colleague had died unexpectedly and another suffered a heart attack, which left me in a state of grieving plus an onerous work load to cope with. Reflecting on these notes in a physically



removed and intellectually detached state of mind, I was worried about how many snippets and utterances by colleagues expressing frustration, weariness and demotivation I collected during this time. It raised issues around emotional projection and bias (Dalton 1964, Becker 1967). However, as a "counter-move" I reflected on these notes, avoided sentimentality and investigated the instances more critically.

In terms of the process of working with data, it demonstrates McAuley's (1985) model of hermeneutic work: switching from the researcher's doubt to critical reflection to the research scene to theory and back. Therefore, I did not dismiss observations such as the above as biased, but accepted them as part of the research scene. Also, the incidents of collecting, recording and using 'naturally occurring talk' might raise questions about the ethical side of this research (Barnes 1979, Gill and Johnson 1991), because the colleagues were not necessarily aware that their remarks would be used in this project. As mentioned in chapter one, the fact that I am conducting research within the school was publicised via the e-mail system. Following this announcement, some colleagues wished me luck, and/or registered an interest or offered advice. Also, questions and enquiries about this project were ongoing throughout and I treat this study very much as overt (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). This can be supported by the fact that I sat in many internal meetings as an observer, where my role as researcher was made explicit. The aim of the data collection was to collect as much 'natural talk' as possible - my asking permission to use pieces of talk for this project would more often than not have distorted the conversation and added an element of self-consciousness. Additionally, the writing up was usually done in my study at home, so that permission was difficult to seek.

This addresses yet two further issues caused by the auto-ethnographic situation. Keeping track of events, making notes is difficult in any circumstances, in view of the absence of clear boundaries between difference and similarity as researcher/employee, my responsibilities linked to work took priority over my ambitions as researcher when being on university premises. Many observations were never properly recorded - this might be considered the lot of every ethnographer - however, in my case many were also never properly registered and therefore lost as data.

The role of researcher/employee results in simultaneous practical doing and critical observation at the best of times, at the worst of times it results in conflicting loyalties and demands. To me it remains essentially a position of critical (self) doubt.

The fieldnote book grew into a collection of notes, scraps of organisational talk, observations mixed with reflections, memoranda and (printed) e-mail messages, loosely attached to each other. E-mail messages have largely replaced hard-copy memoranda, and their particular nature, both more formal than spoken language, but less formal than written language, are emerging as an important means for organisational communication. Also, the book included artifacts (e.g. photographs, brochures) and newspaper cuttings. This paraphernalia was ordered chronologically and reflect the opportunistic element that forms part of this research (Dalton 1959, Riemer 1977.)

In hindsight, i.e. after having finished the research itself and while writing this text, I consider the fieldnote book as the most important tool of data collection. This approach



could have been expanded on by “following up” notes I had taken and approaching relevant colleagues to expand on a theme that emerged as particularly interesting. Thus the fieldnote book could have been the basis to set up a series of quite short interviews elaborating on emergent themes. With the benefit of hindsight, I feel that given the auto-ethnographic situation this approach to data collection would have been possible.

Although I did follow up/seek clarification occasionally, these events remained sporadic efforts rather than being systematically integrated into the research technique repertoire.

### **Meetings**

In the course of this research project I have attended a variety of meetings in a number of roles (Adler and Adler 1987, Gold 1958, Junker 1960).

Observer: I obtained permission to sit in and observe senior management meetings (School Management Group, School Executive Group, Policy Advisory Group). The attendance was negotiated for initially a period of two years and it is hoped that this longitudinal approach has produced deep insights. Extensive notes were made at each meeting and transcribed within a day. A notable difference in the way my presence was treated could be observed. Most of the constituents of the School Management Group and Senior Executive Group I was familiar with and my presence was jokingly accepted (*are you playing fly on the wall again?*). I was offered coffee during the breaks (*but we haven't got any schnaps to go with it.*) and was even asked after a meeting: *Have we passed the test?* In contrast, at the Policy Advisory Group meetings, I did not know the external

constituents and was officially introduced by the Director of the school, both in terms of who I am, what I was doing and the topic of my research. The reception of which, quoted as "Emerging Discourses in Higher Education", was an amused *and what the hell is that about!?* by the most senior attendant (Assistant Principal with direct responsibility for the school), general laughter and a reply by another attendant: *that's why it is a PhD - no one knows what it is about!*. Generally, after that my presence was ignored. In the five minute coffee break I kept to myself in my seated observer position and was left unapproached. My interpretation of this is that my presence was received as non-threatening, the research topic having been found of typical academic obscurity.

Generally speaking the beginning and end as well as breaks during meetings were experienced as awkward. Given my dual role as researcher, (junior) colleague and the senior managers of the school between the object of research, the contrast being the researcher self and my collegial self was left intact. The lack of interaction on both sides during the less structured parts of the meetings may be explained as an attempt to keep these discrepant roles intact.

Participant Observer: Being an employee necessitates the attendance at many meetings, as a course/unit member, subject group member, as a course leader, as a member of the Quality Assurance Committee, the committee to review the current staff development and reward scheme. If in attendance, I acted as an employee and colleague most of the time, following the task-orientation of these meetings. If a matter arose that seemed of



relevance or note worthy (e.g. during one course team meeting a heated discussion spanning assessment-methods emerged. However, implicitly it also reflected the changing nature of the student-lecturer relationship.) I wrote pertinent remarks on a piece of paper and reconstructed the event later on, usually during the evening at home, or if at all possible, in a quiet minute in my office.

Audience: I also attended a number of open meetings as part of the audience, e.g. the open meetings by the Director of school and one open meeting led by the Principal, informing staff about the current and future financial prospects of the university and its impact on the school. In these meetings note-taking was easier, since participation was not imperative.

### **Artifacts and Documentation**

Though the focus of this thesis remains on language and language use in an organisational setting, other semiotic phenomena may not be ignored. In the terminology of organisational studies artifacts are often defined as the visible expressions of organisational culture (e.g. Schein 1984, Siehl and Martin 1989). However, it remains doubtful whether these manifestations are interpreted by all members of the organisation in the same way and whether their meaning remains fixed over time or not (semiosis).

Artifacts are objects, but also include physical arrangements, patterns of behaviour (e.g. rituals), mental representations (stories) (Gagliardi 1990), and written documents (Hodder 1994). They are symbols with ambiguous, multiple meanings. Operationalising their hermeneutic dimension (“what and how may artifacts speak to us when we are seeking to

interpret the culture of an organisation” Gagliardi, p. 13), they can shed light on cultural processes. Gagliardi also points out that students of organisational culture have in the past mainly concentrated on the mental representation (myths, stories) and behaviour patterns to the detriment of material artifacts. By including reflections on material artifacts (e.g. the physical set up of the school, the attempt to introduce an identity card) a more balanced analysis will be achieved. Written texts (e.g. Business Plan, official memoranda, publications) are included in my understanding of organisational artifacts as by-products of the interactions and communication of the organisation. Activating my insider knowledge, they will also be useful to compare the different versions of ordering and managing. They can be analysed as systems of understanding, as such the method of analysis is hermeneutic (Forster 1994). Understanding both textual and other material artifacts rather than hypothesis testing becomes the key methodological issue to be resolved. The relationship between language, artifacts, both objects and texts, researcher and researched is dynamic. Hermeneutic interpretation shuffles backwards and forwards between all three, weaving a picture. Language and artifacts are symbolic systems: they are shorthand representations for something else. As a system, their meaning occurs in a social/cultural context. By deconstructing, i.e. critically asking, their literal meaning, it may be possible to split hidden meaning from obvious ones, to distinguish between multiple meaning and observe occurrences of meaning change (semiosis).



## **Interviewing**

Before giving a more detailed account of the interviewing process, I need to justify why one particular stakeholder group was excluded from the interviewing process. I did not include interviews with management in the schedule. Firstly, if investigating the “everyday life” of organisational members, it is unlikely that senior managers know most accurately everyday practices (Johansson and Mattson 1988, Hellgren and Macdonald 1996). Secondly, within the interpretative paradigm it can be disputed whether the account of managers carries greater “truth” or validity compared to those of other organisational members. However, since they are an influential group, their interaction and the emergence of their thinking has been observed in meetings, where the possibility to be the passive receiver of an instrumentally “laundered version” of events is smaller.

In chapter 1 interviews were described as “provoked accounts” that will contribute a generally accepted way of achieving insights about how individuals in organisational settings construct the meaning and significance of their situation, to probe for new clues, dimensions or even challenging one's own understanding ( Alasuutari 1995, Burgess 1982, Easterby-Smith et al 1991, Gill and Johnson 1991, McCracken 1988, Spradley 1979). The goal of any qualitative research interview is “to see the research topic from the perspective of the interviewee, and to understand how and why he or she comes to have this particular perspective” (King 1994:14). It follows from there, that the format of a qualitative interview will have a low degree of structure imposed by the interviewer and a preponderance for open questions. However, depending on which group was interviewed

the degree of structure varied, from fairly spontaneous, unstructured talks to using more structured interview guides. (For a more detailed break down of interview questions as well as a brief summary of the emergent themes within each interview see appendix 1). The intention was to conduct a series of stakeholder interviews, which distinguished between three groups: organisational newcomers, mid career people and more experienced members of staff, having been at the school for a minimum of ten years. The last two groups emerged as significant during the research process itself. A particularly rewarding group were those people taking early retirement under a scheme the university offered in 1996 (one of the many responses to increasing financial pressures). Their experiences usually span twenty to thirty years at the school/ faculty and/or in higher education, and all of them appreciated the opportunity *to have a final say* (Interview experienced colleague, 9 July 1996).

Selection of Interviewees: In the case of organisational newcomers selection was limited. There is no unlimited pool of newcomers to chose from. The five members I approached were happy to participate in the project which would involve them being interviewed approximately six to eight times over a period of two years. Only three of them were new to a higher education environment. Their socialisation process was to shed light on cultural adaptation and learning processes, including language use. Additionally, they provided a "fresh pair of eyes" for me, making strange for me the settings and procedures of the school, i.e. they served as a triangulation mechanism.

As theorised by Louis (1980), Louis et al (1983) and Waneous (1992) the first year of employment or in a new organisation is particularly eventful, if not difficult. This is



reflected in the changes in this particular cohort. One has found new employment elsewhere, one has changed position within the school.

The questions used to generate talk and interview data were as indicated earlier not meant to be unduly prescriptive or leading. However, I had an interview agenda, (for more detail see appendix 1) i.e. topics I had identified as important based on my own entry experience and having studied the literature. The agenda started with the generation of information about personal and professional background, motivation to apply for a position at SBS and the entry experience, including the interview day. Questions such as "How would you describe your experience of the first few weeks to a friend?" sought to encourage a descriptive/reflective perspective on the part of the respondent. The first interviews proceeded very much from there, in so far as issues, concerns, surprises or comparisons were raised by replying to it, which were pursued as they came up. In one case the perceived lack of *collegial interaction* (17 July 1996) led to an exploration of the structural set up of the school. The same topic was touched upon within the context of discussing the initial relationship with the respective subject leader with another interviewee. In other words, my interview agenda covered the issues and entry experience, expectations/surprises/disappointments. The first round of interviews took place before the beginning of the teaching year (1996) and were followed by the second round after approximately four months. With some of the interviewees I actually formed a working relationship during these months and the discussion was quite often continued outside the official interview setting. Naturally, these conversations were not taped (as the

interviews were, but I often recorded them as verbatim as possible. These extensions of the interview were not necessarily initiated by me, but by the other party, who sometimes called into my office (*you remember that the other day we... talked about the teaching side of things now, I had another thought ...*, field note, 7 March 1996) or they developed out of a natural setting such as jointly assessing student essays. Relationships developed and formed part of the research process (Knight 1994). The questions of the second interview round evolved around issues of teaching, administration, relationship with colleagues, management etc. Partly they were driven by the content of the first interview.

For example I would pose a question such as "You mentioned in the first interview that you did not really know any of your fellow subject group members. Has this changed?"

However, the open invitation at the beginning of the second interview "Tell me about your experience and impressions of the past months" sufficed in all cases to stimulate talk. In three of the cases the interviewees had kept a record of some critical incidents that surprised them, which was welcomed information. In total, the first two rounds of interviews were driven by a broadly set interview agenda, which allowed participants ample space to give their own account of their experience and interpretation of events, people, roles and settings. Also, if something out of the ordinary occurred in between interviews I asked the interviewees about their opinion or reflection on it. An example of this was the School's Strategy Day (June 1996). The follow up interviews, three and four, concentrated on the themes that had developed with each individual interviewee, rather than following a partly set question agenda.



The mid-careerers and friends: Issues arising out of the auto-ethnographic involvement have been discussed in connection with field roles, the reflexive mode of writing and presentation and so on. They are related to the 'ethnographic' part of the word. The selection of people in mid-career, i.e. in their early to late thirties is more strongly related to the prefix of the word, the 'auto' (self) element of this thesis. Even before considering to enrol on a doctoral programme, many of the discussed questions, dilemmas and perspectives arose in my life. I discussed and explored them with colleagues. Naturally, quite often social relationships emerge from a work environment; and, indeed, from the above group I received encouragement, inspiration and support, but also insights that will be used in this thesis. Hollway (1989) in reflection on her doctoral thesis (1982) articulates this conflict for the researcher, when collecting "proper data" derived from a set of clearly defined circumscribed research activities, when the research process as it actually happens is far more complex, spanning and blurring the boundaries between private and researcher self, research scene and life, meaning and method: "... because enjoying myself talking to people who wanted to talk to me did not feel like data gathering. It is only now that I can look at it quite the other way round and say that I succeeded in forging a valuable method: that is, to talk with people in such a manner that they felt able to explore material about themselves and their relationships, past and present, in a searching and insightful way. I did not feel skilful, because it came so easily. It was easy, because the research participants were people like me and we were continuing an activity that was a vibrant part of our subculture at the time. Now I can

believe that this made for good research practice. At the time I was anxious that it was a bit of a con” (p. 11).

Making explicit the voices of colleagues rather than smuggling them in, disguised as my own reflections, is the underlying rationale for the inclusion of this interview group. In terms of the research topic of this thesis, their experience comprises the past five to ten years, thus their perspectives are used to supplement and contrast those of longer/shorter serving professionals. Most of them are lecturers or senior lecturers, carrying responsibility for course, programme or unit administration.

Experienced Colleagues: This terminology is adopted for those colleagues who formed part of the departmental/faculty structure before the then polytechnic was restructured and the schools were formed (officially in 1986, though this is disputed by some accounts). I interviewed five people from this group, three of those were taking early retirement or leaving the school. The intention was to understand their perspective on higher education, spanning a life's experience. The interview agenda was open. Other than asking them to tell me since when and why they worked in higher education, no preset questions were asked by me. The course of the interview was very much determined by the participants. One started off by telling me about his early teaching experience as a lecturer in the education department of a then independent College of Education. He was teaching seminars on the Philosophy of Education. Following on from his considerations, my question was whether he would teach the same seminar today in terms of its content and teaching methods. Thereon followed a discussion about change and stability, changed



status and expectation of students, mass education versus elitist education. Thus reflections triggered questions, which triggered further reflections.

Selection within this group was not difficult, since the early retirement scheme provided a pool of possible interviewees. Many colleagues helped me in the selection of other colleagues for interviewing (*why don't you talk to X. She's got some very specific opinions about that!* - Experienced colleague, 11 July 1996).

Naturally, interviews and ethnographic research are about building and maintaining relationships and rapport (Spradley 1979, King 1994). Being in an auto-ethnographic situation made this aspect easier. Usually, problems of gaining access (Cassell 1988) or of working out ingenious interview repertoires and building rapport (Cassell 1988, King 1994, Platt 1981) are reported in the literature. The permission to conduct research was given equally easily as permission to observe meetings was obtained. However, in the later stages of the project it turned out to be difficult to follow meetings, not so much that access was actively denied, but that the schedule changed so quickly, that only the “insiders” were kept informed. Myself, the outsider as researcher, was not kept informed.

Although I had to develop some skills, found myself in the some awkward situations, the process of negotiation access, the interviewing and listening more carefully to what is being said, was enjoyable.

### **Issues arising from interviewing one's peers**

The relationships I had with the interviewees ranged from having a “nodding acquaintance” to having a solid collegial relationship, and in one case I interviewed a friend. The interview relationship is different compared to interviewing senior managers, in so far as peer interviews form a natural part of participant observation because peers and the researcher are more likely to share similar organisational experiences. Also, peer interviews are dynamic in so far as the strict scheduling conventions of the standard interviewer-respondent scheme do not apply. In several cases a one-to-one interview developed into a group discussion, when colleague(s) entered the room where the interview was taking place unexpectedly and joined in. Some of this data has been incorporated into the thesis. Secondly, the peer interviews are much more open-ended, in so far as “themes” and “issues” were elaborated on outside the interview scene both in terms of the time frame, but also in terms of geographical location. I collected data while queuing at the local pool where I met a colleague, in pubs and in friends’ homes. In other words the relationship between researcher and researched, between research act and social acts blur.

Furthermore, the interviews needed to be socially pleasant occasions, where the appearance of competence needed to be preserved on both sides, because the relationship is to continue after the research event. Several roles are enacted in this situation, interviewer-respondent, a potentially instrumental relationship, as well as collegial or friendship roles. This again raises the general question “whether research roles can be, or



should be, dissociated from the whole self?” (Platts 1981:87). Similarly, Cassell (1977) in an early auto-ethnographic account, reports on her role confusion: “How does an observer differentiate him/herself from the observed, when there is no clear behavioural, social or cultural sign of difference between the two?” (p.413). In peer interviews, there is no great differentiation between the roles. I did not find these “informed chats” or the potential role ambiguity difficult to handle. On the contrary, I found the open-endedness and dynamics of the interview scene conducive to conduct ethnographic research. If ever I felt an awkward split between roles it was when observing meetings of people in senior positions.

In sum, apart from a very broadly set agenda, I followed hunches and interests (such as Dalton did), I grasped opportunities (such as the early retirement scheme) and sometimes was lucky, when hearing something at the photocopy machine that suddenly triggered a thought. However, as Law (1994) observed “Always, it seemed to me, that the real action was going on somewhere else” (p. 46). Obviously, one misses out on many important events during fieldwork, even as an auto-ethnographer. However, “the notion of describing everything is an empirical nonsense which presupposes an all-seeing ethnographic and theoretical eye” (p. 47). Research is per definitionem synecdochial.

### **3.4.1. Relationship with Supervisors**

Within this ethnographic project and the hermeneutic tradition, understanding was also generated in the meetings I had with my supervisors in so far as we discussed my findings

and observations. Just like myself my supervisors are in terms of this project ‘insiders’ to the research scene. Sometimes, their interpretation of or perspective on some events were different from mine. These differences were discussed - usually in an atmosphere of friendly collegiality. These talks informed the writing of this text therefore the relationship with my supervisors formed as much part of the research process as did those with colleagues and peers. Notwithstanding elements of dependency (Ashford 1996), power (Phillips and Pugh 1994) or emotional needs (Cummings 1996) that characterise the research student - supervisor relationship, the relationship that developed with my supervisors bears witness to the blurring of boundaries between researcher, research process and researched. As such, this relationship symbolises the nature of this project as much as it forms part of it. Indeed, the relationship could be understood as synecdochial: It stands for the total engagement in the research scene.

### **3.5. Recording and Transcribing Data**

Data was recorded mainly in the form of field notes as well as interview transcriptions. Interviews were tape recorded, mainly to avoid having to take detailed notes while talking/listening to a colleague. Fieldnotes were reproduced as verbatim as possible and as briefly as possible after the event. Ideally, I would have liked to tape-record this data as well. However, I felt it to be both impractical and inappropriate to equip myself with a tape recorder throughout my working life. Also, it would have been unethical to hide the tape recorder from colleagues, while having a tape recorder on view might have distorted



the language data. Admittedly, recording private talk in forms of fieldnotes is an intrusion, too. However, within this recording convention the ‘immediacy’ is taken out of the research process, while the authenticity of talk remains preserved.

Names, other than my own, have been changed throughout the text in order to uphold anonymity, while gender has been preserved in order not to distort “the story” unnecessarily. Quotes taken from the interview data are allocated a fictitious name and if necessary a date; quotes taken from the field note book are dated and attributed to “a colleague”. Quotes from the data will be put into italics, quotations from the literature are put into quotations marks and referenced according the Harvard System (author, year, page if direct quote). A list of references at the end of the thesis contains the used sources in alphabetical order. Also, when altering or adding to other authors’ quotes in order to comply with grammatical convention or increase reader-friendliness, I acknowledge these changes by initialling them with S.T. (for Susanne Tietze).

Ordering is never complete (Law 1994) and one single order of things does not exist (Turkle 1984, in Law). The usage of mainly the gerundium form when using verbal constructions (e.g. *asking* questions, *ordering* insights) is exploiting an intricacy of the English language, which allows to underline the continuous, unfinished nature of any exercise in ordering and has therefore been chosen as the preferred mode of presentation.

### 3.6 Working with Data (Analysis)

Although the entry experience provided the emotional and intellectual stimulus for this project, the recording of data itself comprised the years 1995 to 1997. The process of working with the recorded data started in early summer of 1996, when sufficient data had been collected (eg interviewing schedule had been started, field note book etc). The process of working with the data is, of course, iterative in so far as additional data was generated throughout the research process, which needed to be integrated into the unfolding analysis.

The research focus as exploring sense-making processes by applying linguistic frameworks provided the channel through which the data was screened. Wolcott (1990) addresses the issue of working with the data as “The critical task .... is not to accumulate all the data you can, but to ‘can’ (ie get rid of) most of the data you accumulate” (p.35).

The selection of data to be integrated into the written account was guided by the organising frameworks as outlined in chapter two. Utilising the structuralist framework, I colour-coded metaphors and metonymies as they occurred in the collected data and itemised those tropes that occurred frequently (eg references to the Time is Money framework or references to geographical arrangements and buildings). Simultaneous to this process of ‘sounding’ and coding the data, a process of clarification occurred. This clarification consisted of a reflection about the nature of the relationship between ‘proper’ or literal and ‘improper’ or figurative meaning, which was to provide a trajectory for the remainder of the analysis. Similarly, the application of the speech act framework provided a focus for



follow-up questions. While new instances were integrated into the analysis all the time, others were revisited and expanded on by exploring the performative potential of tropes. Following the established colour coding, the tropes were conceptualised as speech acts, which perform a social function in the organisation. The guiding question during this stage of the analysis was “What do tropes do?”. Also, the emphasis on the social performativeness of tropes lead to the discursive analysis in which figures of speech were viewed as devices to hegemonially built consensus.

To reiterate, concrete work with the then “welter of data” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:241) was structured on the basis of my pre-understanding as developed from both the organising frameworks as well as my involvement in the research scene. A colour-coding scheme was utilised to distinguish between different tropes, which grew more sophisticated (eg allowing to differentiate between the various forms metonymies can take or acknowledging joint occurrence of tropes). This coding system enabled me to concentrate on episodes/instances that revealed the essence of how meaning is generated, maintained or changed. These instances were incorporated in the written text and “equipped” with sufficient context as to allow the reader to follow the narrative.

The transformation of (ethnographic) experience into a thesis, ie a written piece of work following given conventions, is in itself a rhetorical exercise employing the same verbal strategies (Atkinson 1990, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Hammersley 1993, Hammersley

and Atkinson 1995, Van Maanen 1988). This is explored in greater depth in chapter seven.

### **3.7 Summary**

In this chapter, the research focus and the research objective have been described.

Following on from there, a brief discussion of hermeneutics and its methods of

‘Auslegung’, i.e. interpretation was conducted. Acts of interpretation were then linked to the ethnographic research strategy and its major method participant observation.

Participant observation and author involvement were described both generally and when providing an account of more specific research techniques including the student - supervisor relationship. Also, a brief description of how the analysis of data was conducted was given and concluded by an evaluation of this chosen approach.

Of course, the selection of a research focus is not a random process: “the problem may frequently have personal as well as theoretical interest.” (Cassell 1977:413). The process of focusing on a research theme as well as combining it with organising frameworks is a deliberate choice of method and theme. In choosing a certain method, experience and how it is presented are structured. “Thus a method is a way of talking about reality while at the same time a way of constructing reality.” (Tseelon 1991: 299). A method is not a neutral technical device that links the world, the data and their representation. The implication of this position is that my choice of method is a deliberate commitment to a



“particular metaphor of human behaviour, and a particular picture of reality.” (Tseelon 1991: 300). In so far, the medium is the message.

## **Chapter 4 The Interplay of Metaphor and Metonymy in Organisational Talk, Texts and Artifact(s)**

In chapters one, two and three an outline of this project, a review of selected studies and an account of the research strategies and techniques were given. This chapter is the first to apply one of the selected organising frameworks to the collected data. The investigation will take as its starting point Saussurian structuralism (1916) and its development by Jakobson (1956). An overview over how mainly metaphorical frameworks have been applied to organisational settings is given, followed by a brief outline of theories about figures of speech. In particular, the tropes metonymy and metaphor emerged from the data analysis as the underlying structural mechanism via which sense-making takes place.

The analysis starts with an application of structuralism to an excerpt taken from a meeting. This is followed by an analysis of talk, artifact(s), physical settings, written texts (Lodge 1977) based on a metonymical analysis, followed by an analysis of both structural (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) and image metaphors in organisational talk. On this basis the interplay of metaphor and metonymy will be theorised as producing organisational symbolism. Finally, a critique of the structuralist approach concludes the chapter.

### **4.1. From Structuralism to Tropes**

Saussure's insights concerning the syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions of language were further developed by Roman Jakobson (1956), a Russian/American linguist. Jakobson (1956) wrote about aphasia (loss or impairment of speech) and found that the two major disorders of speech are related to the basic rhetorical figures of metaphor and metonymy. They form the two basic processes of signification. Jakobson demonstrated how they could be linked to Saussure's notion of the vertical (paradigmatic) axis of language (metaphor), whereas metonymy is syntagmatic in character and corresponds to language's horizontal relation. Metaphor and metonymy are the relations between signs, they are first and foremost linguistic (rather than poetic or aesthetic) phenomena. Standard language and language use are metaphorical and metonymical in their very essence. The fundamental nature of language as such has



mainly been ignored both in literary analysis and organisational analysis. The bias of the investigation both in literary analysis as well as in organisation theory is directed towards the metaphoric at the expense of the metonymic. A shortcoming pointed out by Jakobson (1956) and some few literary critics (e.g. Lodge 1977). Little heed has been paid by organisational researchers to metonymic devices and their functions (laudable exceptions are Manning 1979, Barley 1983; in the field of anthropology Levi Strauss 1992, Fernandez 1986; with regard to the rhetoric of writing ethnography see Atkinson 1990, Hammersley 1993), even though the functions of metonymy and metaphor are quite different, since they are generated according to opposite principles.

The strength of the structuralist approach to texts and organisations lies in its ability to treat metonymy and metaphor and their functions as two separate principles - thus enriching and sharpening reflection about organisational processes. Jakobson saw metaphor and metonymy, i.e. processes of selection and combination as suggested by Saussure as the two fundamental dimension of human language. Both metaphor and metonymy can be subdivided into other figures, e.g. simile is a type of metaphor, synecdoche is a type of metonymy, but the distinction between the two figures remain the same. Therefore, a structuralist analysis of language needs to contain an analysis of signs and their relationships to each other. These relationships are based on metaphorical or metonymical ordering. A consideration of metaphor and metonymy needs to form part of a structuralist analysis.

## **Tropes**

Tropes, such as metaphor and metonymy, are “improper or figurative meanings .” (Ricoeur 1978:45). The borrowed term, taken in its figurative sense, is substituted for an absent word, that carries the ‘proper’ meaning. For the discussion it is important to notice that no speaker is forced to substitute a literal sign by a figurative one. Hence, this substitution is significant, albeit not necessarily conducted with full awareness.

The ordering of tropes remains incomplete in so far as different authors suggest different categorisations. Ricoeur (1978) discusses metonymy with synecdoche being subsumed within metonymy, simile within metaphor. Manning (1979) postulates four master tropes: metonymy, metaphor, synecdoche and irony as does Burke (1941).

Gibbs (1993) includes metonymy, irony, hyperbole, understatement, oxymoron and idiomaticity in his taxonomy, Bredin (1984) builds his typology on relations between the literal and the figurative and distinguishes between synecdoche, metonymy and metaphor. In my analysis, which follows the development initiated by Jakobson, the two main tropes to be investigated are metaphor and metonymy under which simile and synecdoche are subsumed respectively. A third trope, irony, emerged during the research process as important and is integrated into the analysis.

Although the relationship between the literal and the figurative in all tropes is one of substitution, the different tropes form this relationship on different bases. Metaphor is a shift of meaning between two signs from a different subject domain. The substitution is



linked to a simultaneous existence of similarity and difference, e.g. in “the car beetles along” the movements of the car are sufficiently similar to those of a beetle to allow comparison. At the same time, however, they are of course also different. Metaphors contain a tension between similarity and dissimilarity.

The word metonymy derives from Greek: metonymia (change of name). It is a shift of meaning from one sign to another based on causal, physical or existential contiguity.

Thus, naming a margarine crown is a metaphorical device, hoping to transfer the supreme nature of the crown to the margarine. However, saying “the Crown has decreed” is a metonymic device, based on contiguity between the Crown and the Monarch. Metonymies comprise relationships of cause to effect, instrument to purpose, container to content, thing to location, sign to signifier, physical to moral, model to thing. (Ricoeur 1978).

## **4.2 Metaphors in Organisational Analysis**

Oswick and Grant (1996) trace the roots of Organisational Development and metaphorical thinking back to Kurt Lewin's work (1946) about the freezing/unfreezing stages in organisational change. With regards to organisation theory these roots go even further back to as early as 1873 to Spencer's application of the biological metaphor to organisations, with the two dominant metaphors being that of organisations as machines (Fayol 1949, Taylor 1911, Weber 1911) and organisations as organisms (Hawthorne Studies: Reothlisberger and Dickson 1939, Trist and Bamforth 1951, Lawrence and

Lorsch 1967, Parsons 1951). Since then organisations have been described in many ways, for example, as icebergs (Selfridge and Sokolik 1975), journeys (Kay 1992), soap bubbles (Tsoukas 1988), theatres (Boman and Deal 1994, Mangham and Overington 1987) with the watershed contribution attributed to Morgan (1983, 1986), who argues that many of the conventional ideas about organisations can be traced back to some images (metaphors), in particular the mechanical and biological ones. In spite of some criticism about the fancifulness of metaphor as a mere literary device (Pinder and Bourgeois 1982, Bourgeois and Pinder 1983), as well as some attempts at refining the debate (e.g. Alvesson's concept of second order metaphors, 1994) the metaphor concept enjoys increasing popularity and proliferation amongst organisational researchers. Similarly, recent publications such as Grant and Osrick (1996) and Osrick and Grant (1996) explore the nature, functioning and role of metaphors and discourses in and around organisations, as well as for organisational development. Additionally, summaries of the debate can be found in handbooks (e.g. Putnam, Phillips and Chapman 1996) and figure in conferences. Contributions such as Mumby and Clair's (1997) essay on organisational discourses, Taylor and Cooren's (1997) work on organisational discourse and communication, Palmer and Dunford's (1996) analysis of the contribution to metaphorical reframing, complete the picture: "Metaphors matter because language matters. As a central constitutive element of language, metaphors often play an important part in determining how we think and act in the world"(Palmer and Dunford 1996: 7). This statement is representative of the current debate amongst organisational analysts.



However, it misses the other side of the language coin: metonymy and its functions. I want to argue that **both metaphor and metonymy matter, because language matters.** As central constitutive elements of language, metaphors and metonymies often play an important part in determining how we think and act in the world. It is hoped, that this chapter will yield some understanding in how both metaphorical and metonymical interplay constitutes and is constituted by organisational events. Also, following on from here, it is not correct to assume that metonymy is one of the subtrope of metaphor (Grant and Oswick 1996). It is a separate trope in its own right and carries different functional aspects.

#### **4.3. Binary and Multiple Opposition**

The examples given in this chapter have been chosen with the objective of demonstrating how linguistic structures determine the process of signification. Firstly, an example of how binary/multiple opposition informs the process of defining a sign (defining something is to be understood as a process of setting boundaries, i.e. a process of ordering) will be given. Secondly, metonymical processes of semiotic systems (language as well as other sign systems) will be discussed. This will be done in some detail, in particular bearing in mind the prevalent neglect of metonymy in organisational analysis. Finally, metaphorical processes will be analysed and reviewed. In the final section, I will argue that the interplay of metonymy and metaphor explains organisational symbolism.

### A Meeting of the Executive Group

The following excerpt was taken from notes I made during a meeting of the executive group of SBS on 26 March 1996. In attendance were the Director, the Head of Undergraduate Programmes, Head of Research and Staff Development, Head of New Venture, the Head of Postgraduate Programmes and the School Manager. The latter was the only woman in the otherwise male assembly. The agenda of this meeting was to be "The New Budget and Devolution", which was to have a major impact on the financial situation and structure of the school as well as the whole university. As an interesting aside, I noted that although the meeting was to be "Rosie's meeting" (school manager), it was nevertheless dominated by the men and occasional attempts to shift it back to her agenda were ignored.

I use the excerpt to demonstrate how the principles of binary and multiple opposition are at work and how they can be applied to talk. The discussion of the motion of "what is a professor?" evolved from a discussion of the status of research in the school. The topic of research was one area that did not form part of the official agenda, but appeared time and time again throughout the afternoon (the meeting took 2.5 hours). All attendees contributed their ideas and understanding to the topic, with the exception of the school manager. A possible explanation might be, that she was the only person at the meeting who did not carry a dual role (academic/manager).



The excerpt is meant to demonstrate the function of binary/multiple opposition rather than to investigate role behaviour or social relationships. With regard to the naming of the speakers, they will be called language speaker A, B etc. The reason for this representation is that a structuralist approach does not primarily concern itself with human agency as enacted in roles, let alone with human individuals. This will be reflected upon in the critical review of this chapter and taken up in later chapters of this thesis.

A: *We need to set up two to four year programmes to get people into research. We got to do that. Also, you have to have people drop off the plank.*

B: *There will be at least one this year.*

C: *In research, you cannot do this as a short option. Send our people to the PRC - if there is no outcome, other people are pissed off if other people do not deliver. Research is dead easy to measure. In four years I want to see for a researcher: one book of original thought, twenty conference papers, ten articles.*

B: *They are reviewed every two years.*

C: *Let's take the RAE. Five very active researchers left in the past twelve months. But active researchers do not leave if they think the culture is right.*

B: *Where are the readers?*

C: *They come out of my budget, the research fellows don't.*

B: *This raises another issue. What else is different about this place, compared to our competitors. Our professorate is a personal title, not a role. Therefore, we do not expect anything of our professors?*

C: *In the old unis ...*

B: *... just a personal title. We could take the view that we do have expectations, just in the same we have expectations of our readers.*

A: *So do we have control? Do we have control whoever gets it?*

- B: *If you are a professor without a role, you are just like any other member of staff, e.g. like (names two names).*
- A: *We have expectations of Principal Lecturers, Senior Lecturers.*
- C: *In the old universities they are the top senior job. The problem is that we have SAPs (Senior Academic Postholders) and professors. How do they go together? The role of the professor is absolutely prime. You have SAPs, who are not profs, but profs who are not SAPs? You've even got subject groups without a professorship in them.*
- B: *(Hugo) as example. He is that type of professor, not a SAP, but also he has got no professor role. He does almost 500 hours teaching. I said to his subject leader to get in under 400.*
- C: *It should be under 300.*
- B: *What do professors do?*
- C: *THINK!*
- A: *(Hugo) does not have this role. He is not a researcher. His role is not as a professor. He is networking. to C: you are putting forward a traditional notion of professor.*
- D: *There are criteria for what a reader does. The reader is a role.*
- C: *No, it's a job.*
- D: *We have a document that says this is what you need to deliver.*
- C: *Well, it is never like that!*
- D: *Well.*
- E: *Here, professor is a status, not a role.*
- A: *Ten minutes ago, I said that.*
- B: *Is this the bloody limit of our expectations?*
- D: *We need to link it down to what a reader does. We need to link it.*
- B: *No, not necessarily. We need to move the school forward. In C's terms we are thinking for next year about mentoring.*



- A: *But we have no control over the people who have aspirations to this?*
- ?: *There is a panel.*
- E: *This piece has been brought in very cunningly.*
- B: *No, we are talking about resourcing and top slicing.*
- A: *I really do think, if we are top slicing within the school ...*
- B: *Well, I can reformulate. We have got two SAPs without proper roles. How do we resource them?*
- A: *Mentoring needs to be top-slicing role. Networking not.*
- B: *What comes out of A's budget? I can get a premium price - sounds awful - for (Name), but ...*
- D: *I do not know what networking is.*

In a Saussurian analysis, the problem in this discussion was that the relationship between the phonetic utterance [professor] and the concept of professor was unclear. However, according to structuralist thought, a sign is only meaningful, if the signifier can be put into a clear relational structure with the signified (concept). Furthermore, signs are relational in themselves and with each other: they are in binary/multiple opposition. The concept of *professor* only makes sense if it can be distinguished clearly from other concepts such as *Senior Academic Postholder (SAP)* or *reader* and what they are connotated with, e.g. status, title, role, rank and so on. The attendees did not succeed in "negotiating" or agreeing on a shared understanding of what being a professor means. The course of the discussion was as follows: The discussion was opened by defining *professor* as a title as opposed to a role. As a title it was seen to be meaningless, because it could not be put into

binary opposition with any other concept (*without a role, you are just like any other member of staff*). The attributing of *title* with *mere, only, just like any other member of staff* clearly indicates that this is not a desired status quo. As a response to this it was pointed out that the title *professor* was more appreciated in the *old universities* (NB new versus old universities forms yet another binary opposition) and that the problems were created by the lack of clear differences between a *SAP, readers* and *professors* (*you have SAPs, that are not profs, but profs that are SAPs*). It was suggested by the same speaker that the distinguishing feature of *professors* are that they *think* (as manifested in research activities and publications). This was disputed by pointing out that one of the school's professors was not a researcher at all, but was an active teacher and networker, which in turn provoked a query to define *networking*. The notion of *professor* meaning *thinker* was rejected as *traditional*. The introduction of *reader* as someone with a clear role and a job description was challenged on the grounds of it being a *job, rather than a role* and that job descriptions did not reflect the actual reality of a *reader*. The various ideas were reiterated and the only new contribution was to define *professor* as a status (as opposed to a mere title), indicating seniority and importance. The discussion was wound up by suggesting that meaning be bestowed to *professor* by allocating a mentor role to it. The meeting then turned back to issue of budgeting procedures.

The conventional rather than the natural or divine nature of the signs is the reason why human agents can engage in discussions that attempt to lay the boundaries of meaning. In this particular situation neither of the suggested interpretations emerged as dominant nor



was any generally agreed upon. Within the boundaries of this discussion *professor* is a problematic sign - implying no generally accepted definition within the context of a new university ( as opposed to an old university - where it is assumed to be a clearly defined sign - a level to which at least one of the speakers aspires to). The briefly interpreted excerpt indicates to me that the school has not come to terms with the transition from a polytechnic to a university and is in many respects in search of a meaningful existence. This can be seen by the fact that the oppositions between signs are not fixed and the process of discussing the signified (meaning) of the signifier reveals the uncertainty of the "undefined" status quo. It remains unclear what *professor* forms a binary position with. Indeed, it is “tested” out against several other signs. Secondly, the excerpt also shows that what Eco (1979) calls the chains of significance, i.e. that signs are linked to each other in such a way that if the relationship of one sign to other signs is unclear, further relationships, the whole system, is affected by this: The discussion around how to define *professor* triggers another potential discussion around the definition of networking (*I don't know what networking is*), even though it is not taken up in this discussion.

This excerpt will be used again, when discussing issues of powerful and powerless accounts, and when contextualising talk. However, its main purpose was to demonstrate what is meant by binary/multiple opposition in this thesis.

#### 4.4. Metonymy

In the following examples of metonymical processes, both linguistic and artifactual data are used. These will show how metonymical devices inform sense-making processes and are indeed the abode of cultural understanding in organisations. The examples I have chosen are not, as was the case with the previous example, contextualised in the meta- or other organisational discourses, rather they provide the basis for another part of the structuralist analysis. I give several uncontextualised instances of organisational talk in order to demonstrate the different functions of metonymy. The chosen “step-by-step” approach to analysis implies that **the interpretation of data unfolds gradually**. This process of unfolding stretches sometimes over several chapters, e.g. when the same instance is interpreted from a different (linguistic) perspective. Each perspective contributes a new insight, deepening the analysis. The conclusive chapter provides a synthesis which integrates the different steps.

Many of the given instances contain several tropes, i.e. metonymy and irony, metonymy and personification, metonym and metaphor. In this part only metonymical devices will be discussed in detail. Metaphorical devices will be discussed in part 4.5.

As explained previously, the syntagmatic/metonymic relationship between signs strings them together in a certain order. As such each utterance or sentence as a combination of signs is metonymical and other than observing it, leaves little else to say. Jakobson (1956) has reflected upon this and said that metonymy "defies interpretation". However, a closer



investigation shows how common-sensical knowledge is constructed by employing metonymic devices. The underlined words are metonymical in function.

Instance 1: (Fieldnotes, 28 February 1996, research meeting of IB + L subject group)

*We have got a bad reputation or a reputation of being a research inactive group.*

*Everyone needs to realise that promotion is only to be had, if you are research active and that means having output to show. The way things are going, it might not be even a question of having a career, but to keep your job.*

The signifier *research active* is first causally linked to receiving promotion/having a career. Due to the arbitrary and therefore changeable relationship between signifier and signified, this sign can be further developed to *research active* implies *having output*. The connection between *research active* and *having output* is put into logical connection with “gaining promotion”, which is expanded on to “keeping one's job”. This shift in meaning from one signifier to the other can be conceptualised as an instance of metonymy (as in “to boil the kettle”, which means to boil the water in the kettle, the movement of meaning is shifted by contiguity from the water to the kettle). In other words, being research active can only gain promotion or even safeguard one's job, if there is quantifiable output to show for it. The metonymic shift in meaning is based on causal association (contiguity). This might sound like a trivial discovery, but this metonymic shift in meaning of being research active has already been internalised by staff and has led to behaviour changes (to be discussed in chapter 5). Issues around research and research activities form a common

part of daily talk and activities. Instance 2, taken from a meeting between subject leaders, a research professor and the Head of Staffing, deals with the question of "who should be a researcher".

A: *The uni has embarked on a strategy that was since 1992 "everybody ought to do it". That has changed. Now it is "focused selectivity". Of course, this runs the risk of research being over there and over there. (...) The word elite has been mentioned. It used to be elite to develop and lead master programmes. Now everybody does it. It used to be elite to work in the Martin Pepper world, the Prague thing. Now, everybody can get in. Now it is research. It is now elite to be submitted to the RAE exercise.*

on the same issue (PAG meeting, 25 June 1996)

A: *I looked at submitted staff. Very volatile. Fifty percent are repeat performers, twenty-five percent are new staff - that means that not enough young blood is coming in.*

B: *There is a second tier of staff who are active, but not in.*

A: *We should call them research selective, rather than to deselect staff.*

Metonymy fulfils several functions in these examples. One entity is being used to refer to another (this happens on the basis of contiguity), e.g. *research* refers to all research



activities such as reading, writing, publishing, field work, data collection etc. However, the details of what research entails are **deleted**. Similarly, in *research happens over there and over there*, *over there* stands for the two research centres, the Policy Research Centre and the Change Management Research Centre. *Over there* entails their physical existence, their members and the activities they engage in. They have been shortened to *over there and over there*. This is an instance of the generalised local building standing for research activities in general, i.e. an instance of metonymy.

In the case of Martin Pepper's Prague thing, the location (Prague) stands for the project, which is an MBA project developed under the auspices of that particular person (personification). Again, the total meaning as expressed in a notional sentence such as "The Master of Business Administration link with the University in Prague that was developed in Martin Pepper's new venture portfolio" has been shorted by deletion to the Prague thing - a metonymical deletion of several items. Even an abbreviation such as MBA for Master of Business Administration is metonymical in so far as the meaning is moving from the whole term to the shortened MBA.

Similarly, *staff* and *elite* each summarise particular groups of members of the organisation. *Staff* in this context meaning academic members of staff. *Elite* being a further specification of staff as those members engaged in prestigious activities. Young *blood* works on the same principle of deletion, as a synecdoche (pars pro toto). The part (blood) stand for the whole body or person. The other parts of the body having been "deleted"

from this trope. The existential contiguity of blood and body allows the metonymic device to function, so that blood here comes to symbolise (how this is achieved will be discussed later) a new generation bringing in fresh ideas.

The previous examples show how common-sense knowledge (Garfinkel 1967) is constructed by causally linking signs. This construction of “common-sense” happens via the activation of the metonymic figure of speech. Similarly, the speaker of the words *It used to be elite to work the Martin Pepper world, the Prague thing* assumes common understanding of what this particular world entails.

Metonymies such as part for the whole (*Patricia might very well feel a hand on her shoulder, I had been in that job for five years and I had itchy feet, At that meeting we all agreed that we need to cover our backs. Students are just so convinced of their bloody rights.*), institutions for the people responsible (*the university has achieved, this school is getting older, SBS is tired and without any umpf*), the place for the institution (*the Prague thing, I am proud of this place, this place has made me ill and I intend to let people know about it*), plus many references to the actual buildings - which will be discussed later in this chapter and controller for controlled (*you can see Ford at work, if you look at cycle one and two*) inform organisational talk.

In these metonymies the deletion of knowledge that is taken for granted results in the ‘nominalisation’ of the trope. In this process of ‘nominalisation’ one sign or signs has or



have been substituted for another, usually an inanimate noun, thus deleting human agency in the process.

### **Organisational Stories**

Jakobson (1956) characterised prose as "forwarded essentially by contiguity", i.e. it describes logical relationships between concepts or entities or events. Organisational stories have been theorised extensively in the organisation theory literature (e.g. as part of socialisation processes - Martin and Powers 1983, transmitting cultures - Wilkins 1983, as part of oral history - Dandridge 1983, as instruments of culture change - Gabriels 1993 as the expression of nostalgia - Wilkins and Thomson 1991, incidents of learning - Gold 1996), but have not really been regarded as metonymical devices by organisational theorists. If prose is essentially metonymical, spoken prose as in organisational stories and anecdotes are subject to the same device of developing the story forward. By condensing what is symptomatic and meaningful in general into one event told in a story, stories and anecdotes are representative of a "slice of life" (*pars pro toto* principle). The very phrase "slice of life" points to the synecdochial character of the story. One such "slice" shall be quoted to demonstrate what is meant by the synecdochial (i.e. metonymical) character of organisational stories:

*We had a meeting. There were five teaching this unit on level one and as you know we get materials together and so on. Peter volunteered to get it into a standard format and as he had done so, he asked for comments. And only I*

*commented. Peter said, I wish people commented, for ownership. I saw Maria in the corridor some time after that. She is a PhD student, part time teacher, why don't you let Peter know if you have some thoughts on this, and she said, oh no, you and Peter know so much more about it.*

*ST: I see what you mean...*

The interviewed lecturer (Martha, experienced colleague, 17 July 1996) then interpreted this story for me, demonstrating her awareness of the symbolical value of this incident.

*Now that to me is an example of this hierarchical culture - totally misplaced in an academic environment. There is no earthly reason why her contribution, how you teach, shouldn't be equally valid to mine, Peter's and everybody else. She is a junior member of staff, she is recent and she is part time, but in that academic context we are equals, we are all making a contribution. And she didn't think that (...). I think of it as symptomatic. A symptom of something very hierarchical.*

The event itself stands for something else (hierarchical culture), which is linked to the example by causal contiguity. The example described is a condensed version, deleting all other experiences of this particular lecturer, so that the told story comes to symbolise "hierarchy" and its effect on organisational members.



No personal experience story is ever a purely individual production (Denzin 1989). It derives its meaning from a larger group or organisational setting. Martha's story is located within the shared experience of colleagues of the same organisation, which provides the bedrock of the (taken-for-granted) assumption about the existence of a hierarchy and its penetration of collegial relationships. Of course, a story is always an interpretive account. Since I know the PhD student Martha was talking about, my own interpretation of the events would have grounded Maria's conduct in her lack of self-confidence rather than in the corruption of egalitarian relationships by the principles of hierarchy. However, I could still *see what you (Martha) meant (mean)*, because her story reflects a cultural and social process. Stories conceptualised as metonymical devices are the habitus of cultural knowledge. Although I did not agree with Martha's interpretation, I could still share the meaning of this story. The meaning as inherent in the metonymic device is shared, but not agreed upon.

### **Theorising Instances of Metonymical Talk**

The sentence *The Old Hall has dumped this on us* (a colleague, 29 January 1996, corridor talk) is a transformation of the notional sentence "The members of the executive met in the Old Hall and decided to implement a certain decision" by means of deletion. The rhetorical figure of metonymy results because items are deleted from a possible combination of words. "Members of the executive" was deleted and the place of their meeting was taken in lieu of the persons themselves. I should like to argue that a stranger to the particular locations of SBS would not be able to understand the exact meaning of

*The Old Hall has dumped this on us.* A stranger would not know that the "Old Hall" is the frequent meeting place of the executive group and the residence of the director and some of the senior decision makers of the school. A stranger would not know that SBS is split into several sites and subsites, The Old Hall, Ballard Block, Dyson House, the Policy Research Centre, the Language Centre, nor would a stranger be aware of the hierarchical positions that are frequently associated with these locations. A stranger knowledgeable in the general history of the UK might infer meaning about the grandiose and traditional nature of old halls in general, being the natural residence of older, more senior members of the community. However, this would be guesses, not knowledge. Therefore, **the deletion of items from a combination of items on the basis of contiguity requires the reader/listener to make assumptions about what has been deleted, what is implicit in the metonymical device.**

For example, in the previously discussed instance *research happens over there and over there*, the listener has got to make assumptions about *over there and over there* what they refer to. In the set-up of SBS *over there* means the two research centres. Again, an outsider would not necessarily be able to decode this statement. Metonymical devices relating to the particularities of specific locations and people need decoding, i.e. they are the residence of specific cultural knowledge as it is manifested in geographical arrangements. Other metonymies (hand for person, symbolising here authority, Ford for a particular way of organising work in industrial societies, acronyms like MBA) are part of



cultural settings, be they organisation specific or related to a specific industrial or national culture.

Kittay (1987) builds on Hofstadter's (1985) framework of default assumptions in order to understand this process. **Default assumptions** are those "upon which speakers rely, in both verbal and non-verbal behaviour, in the absence of any contextual evidence cancelling or questioning such assumptions. Because speakers are scarcely conscious of employing such assumptions, they presume, again with little consciousness of making such presumptions, that their audience has the same assumptions. They are default assumptions because they are what we assume in the absence in any contradictory evidence (...). Variations in our default assumptions are continuous. They range from that which are shared virtually by all who employ a given language and exist within a cultural tradition, to those shared by subcultures (...), specific professions (...), religions (...), genres (...) to those shared by a few speakers whose lives are so intimately entwined that a single word conveys to one another what would require sentences to communicate to a stranger, and finally those established ad hoc, for the purpose of *a given* discourse or conversation" (pp 55 - 56). Kittay then defines in some more detail general background default assumptions, special background default assumptions, discourse specific default assumptions and group specific default assumptions (pp. 56 - 58). I would like to argue that the use of metonymical devices in language activated by one speaker (e.g. *research happens over there and over there*) makes the audience in the room activate default assumptions about *over there and over there*. In the above quoted instances, the default

assumptions are fairly specific to the geographical arrangements of SBS (*over there and over there*) as well as discourse specific (research discourse). A knowledge of what research activities entail and how they impact on the organisational life of organisational members is presupposed by both the speaker and the audience. Metonymies require access to common ground information to create interpretation (Gibbs 1993).

In instance 1, the causal contiguity between being *research active* and *gaining promotion/keeping one's job* was forced. This metonymical combination presupposed the assumption that this connection is 'true', i.e. that good and visible performance in research will lead eventually to promotion. This taken-for-granted- assumption is shared by the audience - at least no one contradicted, even though the 'truth' of this logic is not born out by promotion events. All recent promotions and most appointment for more senior positions are linked to administrative or managerial responsibilities. Nevertheless, the audience followed this logic, because the metonymical device is cultural. It relies on the pre-known, the pre-established and therefore "makes sense".

Cultures, including organisational cultures are mute, they work implicitly rather than explicitly (Louise 1980, Schwartz and Davis 1981, Turnstall 1983, Schein 1985, Lorsch 1986, Scholz 1987, Denison 1990, Williams, Dobson and Walters 1993, Brown 1995). Metonymy functions actively in every culture. "Metonymic concepts allow us to conceptualise one thing by means of its relation to something else" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 39). This relation can be defined as contiguity (Jakobson 1956, Lodge 1987), which



Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe as involving “direct physical or causal association” (p.39) I have argued that the physical association of the building and its inhabitants can be used in a metonymical way by organisational members, who by doing so refer to the school specific arrangements and how they are experienced by organisational members. Paying heed to when, how and which organisational members use metonymies in everyday talk reveals insights into the cultural milieu of the organisation. Also, as one can see in the examples, metonymy “deletes” human agency - so that only a socialised member of the organisation can decode the metonymic structure and infer about the human agency in the events.

The understanding of events, including speech events, depends on the ability to decode these default assumptions. Garfinkel (1967:36) uses a similar concept of “seen, but unnoticed expected background features of everyday scenes [which] the members of the society use as a scheme of interpretation.” These background expectancies are implicitly but actively used, when interpreting social reality. Frequently, they are expressed as tropes. Therefore, it is possible to investigate the process of how (common) sense is constructed by focusing this analysis on figures of speech.

Furthermore, the interviews with newcomers showed that in their first six months of organisational experience (covered by the first two interviews) no allusion to the geographical arrangement or the Totley-Dyson divide was made. A greater awareness began to emerge only after about nine months of employment, where comments about *my*

*Dyson House existence .. the work is different.* (Newcomer interview 1, 26 January 1996)

were made, providing some evidence that they had learned about various modes of existence within the school and linked these to the geographical arrangement.

### **Metonymy and Artifact(s)**

Saussure himself has suggested that semiology could be used to interpret not only the language system, but also all other societal (and organisational - S.T.) systems. As such organisational artifact(s) such as physical settings, objects may be included in a semiotic analysis. Barthes (1967, 1988) was the main and most creative advocate of applying Saussurian tenets to other sign systems such as the garment system, the food system, the car system, the furniture system and other complex systems (e.g. cinema, television, advertising). Others have followed (e.g. Kittay 1987 on the furniture system, although she describes it in purely metaphorical terms, Barley 1983 on the culture of a funeral home, Agar 1994 on his experience on diving in Crumel, as well as on restaurant menus).

The above are some attempts to conceptualise artifact(s) as part of a semiotic analysis, though quite often they are understood as exclusively metaphorical/symbolical expressions of the organisational mind. In terms of a metonymical analysis, physical settings, equipment (e.g. photocopy machine) are viewed as relating signs by contiguity and as being combined together (like words in a sentence are continuously combined via grammatical rules), e.g. the furniture in an office can be "strung together" in such a way that it resembles a living room. Thus the metonymical arrangement of discrete items of



furniture comes to resemble more a living room than an office: office comes to metaphorically mean "living room", which symbolises the indivisibility of professional and personal self. Indeed, when showing a visitor around the Totley premises, she actually exclaimed: *This looks like a living room* (fieldnotes, visitor, 6 June 1996). Of course, many offices reflected their functional use. However, some areas, including public meeting places, were arranged in a way as to resemble "a living room".

With regard to other artifact(s), objects like the photocopy machine can be simply seen as a piece of equipment. However, framing it as part of the metonymical arrangement of the school's interior setting will yield better understanding of how and why photocopies machines in particular carry heavy symbolic implications in the minds of organisational members.

In the following section, a metonymical analysis of the school's buildings, some artifact(s), including failed artifact(s) and written texts will be conducted.

### **Physical Settings**

By physical settings I understand the immediate built environment of the organisation as well as the exterior and interior design of these buildings, including furniture and equipment. The symbolic aspect of physical settings has been recognised by organisational theorists (e.g. Berg and Kreiner 1990) and occasionally addressed (Grafton-Small 1985, Grafton-Small and Linstead 1986), but as Berg and Kreiner point out: "We

are bound to conclude that at the level of organisations the significance of physical settings (especially that of corporate buildings) is almost entirely without theoretical underpinning” (p.44). By basing my analysis on structuralist theory, I hope to provide such a mechanism which allows me to frame physical settings as expressions of organisational symbolism.

When reading the accumulated data, I was amazed how many references were made to physical settings, in particular to names of buildings and equipment.

As previously stated, SBS is a multi-site school. There was at that time a Totley Campus, which was divided into a Lowfield and a Highfield site. Within the context of the school the Highfield Site is referred to as "the Old Hall" and “Ballard” (Block) is the Lowfield Site. Totley is set in a rural environment, some six miles outside the city centre and is the location of the postgraduate and postexperience courses. The offices of the Director, one of the research centres and its Director's office, the secretariat and marketing unit, several teaching and meeting rooms are located in the Old Hall. The research staff is in the E-corridor in the same building. Ballard Block is a more recent purpose built office block, separated from the Old Hall by a gently rising pathway and a crossing road. It contains the offices of staff involved in the postgraduate area, programme and secretarial offices the office of the Head of Postgraduate Programmes, several teaching rooms, the school technicians' rooms, and the TESOL centre. Dyson House is a multi-storey office block in the city centre near the bus and railway station and houses the school's undergraduate and



higher diploma programmes and their programme and secretarial offices, as well as teaching rooms and offices of staff. Also, the Head of Undergraduate Programmes and his associates are in this building, while the second research centre is located in a separate unit in the "Science Park" across the road. Dyson House is not only used by SBS, but also by another big school, the school of Financial Studies and Law. It also hosts computing facilities and a cafeteria for students.

In terms of a structuralist analysis, the school consists of several sites, which are metonymically linked, like words in a sentence. Their specific spatial arrangement across the City of Sheffield came to carry particular meanings for the members of SBS. An example has already been given (*The Old Hall dumped this on us*), where "Old Hall" functions as a metonymy for "members of the executive", because of the existential contiguity of the people meeting together and the building they meet in (however, it is perfectly possible that the executive met somewhere else when making that particular decision. However, the metonymic device still works, since it is essentially cultural in nature). Later on I shall argue that the metonymical arrangement together with metaphorical interpretation came to symbolise essential realities.

The school was scheduled to move into a new building in the summer of 1997, which will house the school and all its activities. The new building and in particular the allocation of office space (a open plan office) as well as new activities associated with the new building are widely and controversially discussed. In particular issues around privacy (*what will*

*we do if a student wants to discuss a private matter*), professionalism (*I cannot work in an open environment. I need a room to think*) and issues of co-operation (*we will be sitting in our subject group cage and not talk to other people*) are voiced in the debate. These concerns - but also positive anticipation (*I look forward to moving into town. It'll make it a hell of a lot easier to talk to PRC* all fieldnotes around January to July 1997) are not unusual and discussed in the literature (e.g. Hatch 1990, Oldham and Fried 1987).

However, the physical setting and its metonymical array express a certain order within the school and a change of this order is emotive and controversial.

Instance 1: New Building - New Thinking (PAG, 21. March 1996, Old Hall, Sitting

Room). The language speakers are the Head of New Ventures, a Visiting Professor and an external Advisor from Industry.

A: *We will, we are in the process of designing that is, programmes of executive seminars, em, around the new building, a window of opportunity, em, local and regional seminars for people in executive positions (..) The building is built to offer value service to local executives.*

B: *Why is this new building starting all this thinking? There are decent rooms to hire!*

C: *We talk about the building, the only thing that is underlined on this paper. People, business people are concerned about car parking.*

A: *Done it, got it right. The only thing we have not got.*

C: *It's a prestige symbol.*



A: *We are in a stage of run down here. It is a chance to gain profile.*

On the level of the sign the new building (n-b) implies a new area of activity on the level of the signified, which is in line with the strategic outlook of developing a new market segment and to raise the profile of the school. As before, meaning is transferred from the sign n-b/n-a (new building/new activity) to r-p/n-a (raise profile/new activity) by causal metonymy. This causal assumption is queried (*Why is this new building starting all this thinking? There are decent rooms to hire!*) by one of the outside agents who attends these meetings. However, the comment is not taken up.

The new building only makes sense to this particular group (external advisors, senior staff of school) by transferring meaning from the level of one signified (n-b) to another: r-p (this is metaphorically expressed as well as *window of opportunity*). Thus the new building reflects the purpose of the business and becomes a significant element of corporate strategy (Berg and Kreiner 1990, Steiler 1984). Although the lack of car parking space implies a danger to the strategic intent: Car parking space symbolising prestige in a society and culture reliant on this particular form of transport.

#### Instance 2: New Building - New Boundaries

Unlike in the current metonymical arrangement of the school, in the new building members will be located in open space offices in their respective subject groups (the school consists of six subject groups: Human Resource Management/Organisational Behaviour, International Business, Languages, Strategy, Decision Making, Marketing).

The new building is associated with boundaries: *We are discussing this at the moment.*

*Peter is really trying to establish new boundaries for the new building* (April 1997).

Although, the redrawn boundaries of the school are also metonymically linked to a lack of privacy: *I will not move into an open space office. I will simply not do it. If I have to burn my books, I will put him [the director] on top of it.* (Fieldnotes, a colleague, 2 February 1997). Space is regarded here as private, the realm of academic prerogative. Whereas in quotes such as *Behaviour for space and using space is flippant. You can't just grab it. You will have to pay for it. Floor space will cost you. You can have more floor space, if you have the work to do and to pay for it.* (open meeting, Director, 14 June 1996). The allocation and use of space is rationalised and commodified (see also Rosen, Orłowski and Schmahmann 1990 on the commodification of space). In the light of this last quotation, the ordering of space into individual offices is flippant, i.e. too expensive.

### Instance 3: Totley versus Dyson

In the organisational talk I observed, the split site nature of the school is generally articulated as Totley versus Dyson, even though de facto this is not quite true. The City Campus site comprises Dyson House, the Language Centre premises, the Policy Research Centre and the Totley Campus site comprises the Ballard Block, the Old Hall. However, within the cultural habitus of the school, Totley and Dyson are the terms generally referred to by members of SBS. Members exclusively based in the Ballard Block in Totley further distinguish between the Old Hall (*them or up there*) and Ballard Block (*us*), members based in the Old Hall use *Ballard Block* and *Dyson* whereas members in Dyson House do



not distinguish between these two. They metonymically refer to the whole of the Totley campus as *Totley*.

Phone call (myself) 4 December 1996, intending to talk to a lecturer in German, but conversation with other member of staff who shares the offices developed.

S:     *How are things then in lovely Dyson? [intended as a social rather than opinion-seeking question]*

A:     *This is, em, don't know how to reply to this. Em or say this. This, em Dyson, is "real", the real world compared to Totley. Some people there are so out of touch. You couldn't put them before undergrads. Some will have a rude awakening next September, when we are all down here. I know that some claim that they are in touch, like Norman, who does 8 hours or so, but then he only sees them at their best in the final year and it's not the same, it is not the same as doing it day in, day out, every day of the semester, year after year.*

I was tacitly assuming that the listener would detect the ironic meaning of *lovely Dyson* by assuming the opposite of the literal meaning, i.e. he would recognise the literal meaning as inappropriate and make an inference about my intended meaning. Being ironic also shows the speaker's critical attitude and by virtue of choosing irony over literal criticism is the behaviour of a witty, distanced and cool person (Winner and Gardner 1993: 431). In this quotation provoked by my ironic opening remark (*lovely Dyson* - indicating that instances

of irony could be treated as expressing cultural knowledge) the building Dyson and its activities (undergraduate teaching) is put into direct opposition with "Totley" and its respective activities. Teaching in Dyson is bestowed with being *real* and *in touch*. Totley with being out of touch. Also, Totley is being associated with the most senior member of the school, (Norman) who is *out of touch*. *Dyson* is associated by a member of "Totley staff" in another quotation with *The machine, repetitive and efficient*. (Fieldnotes, a colleague, 13 March 1997). The perception of the cultural reality of the school by its members is very much determined by the metonymical setting, which is the split between several campi and the associated activities. The Totley Campus in the general mind-set of the school being linked to better promotion opportunities, a nicer work environment and the Dyson site to the nitty-gritty "real world" (in the eyes of Dyson staff) and mainly as being unfriendly in terms of the working environment (in the eyes of Totley staff). De facto, neither is true. The most recent promotions to principal lecturer level were given to staff involved in undergraduate activities *dealing with the dross* (fieldnotes, a colleague, 23 April 1996). Efforts by the school's management are made to bestow equal value to both sites, and many members of the school are actively engaged in both undergraduate and postgraduate activities. However, cultural assumptions are long-lived and do not necessarily abide by the laws of logic.

Instance 4 Photocopying: This instance shows how exterior and interior settings are related to each other in the mind of organisational members. It is set in the



staff/photocopy room at Ballard/Totley and took place while I was photocopying. (20 March 1996)

A: *Hey, you've developed the skill of copying into an art form.*

ST: *Yea, got to learn to be quick. Actually, Norman would be worried about the amount of copies I can do in fifteen minutes.*

B: *Ha, people like Norman and Martin do not copy themselves. They get the secretaries to do it.*

A: *They are doing this. They are causing this. All this about student centred learning. How do they think it is achieved. Students want copies of overheads and all.*

C: *Do you know that this [holds up sheet of paper] is cheap ice-skating? The photocopy paper in Ballard is less thick than the one used in the Old Hall. - Here, have a look at this. 80g/m<sup>2</sup> - up there it is 90g/m<sup>2</sup>.*

D: *You'd better go down and compare it to Dyson standard then. I bet it's 50 or so. If it happens in Totley, it happened in Dyson five years ago.*

This instance demonstrates the internal oppositions that have developed between Totley and Dyson and Totley/Ballard and Totley/Old Hall. These dichotomies are captured in the thickness of the paper that is used for photocopying purposes - which echoes the perceived differences between "those who do their own copying" and "those who don't". The near identification of staff with equipment in particular the photocopy machine is articulated in expressions such as *when this machine breaks down, our stress levels go up* (fieldnotes, a

colleague, 4 April 1996) and indicates the increasing contiguity of man and machine/academic and photocopy machine. The physical remoteness of senior staff as *up there* (Old Hall) is as much understood as physical aloofness as an expression of them being *out of touch*, since they do not share in mundane activities such as photocopying, nor do they have to bear the results of their strategic decisions.

In other instances, such as *what worries me is the £100 000 this school spends annually on its photocopying budget* (Director, open meeting, 14 June 1996), the activities around photocopying are framed in the discourse of economics and come to stand as a cost item. This awareness is also referred to in the quoted conversation, when I myself point out that my photocopying must be the source of (financial) worries for the Director.

#### Instance 5: Moving House

Summer 1997 saw a far reaching break in the metonymical arrangement of SBS, which signified an incision in the previously taken-for-granted cultural knowledge. The significance of changing location lies in the symbolic value that is attributed to such changes: A colleague quoted *Stunde Null* (~hour zero, symbolising a new beginning), meetings were determined by the *countdown* (fieldnote 23 June 1997.) However, although the impact of the move has been important in so far as established structures were destroyed and new ones had to be learned, it is nevertheless preposterous to assume that social and hierarchical relationships were to disappear overnight. *The Totley-Dyson divide will live on(...)* there is talk that undergraduate students will not be allowed into



*the new building*. (Peer interview, 18 February 1997). Thus, it is assumed that the old structural divide will provide the pattern for a new structural divide. Also, comments such as *of course it (Totley-Dyson divide) still exists. Look, who has got single offices*. (Fieldnotes, a colleague, 16 January 1998), implying that the managers based formerly in Totley, had received preferential treatment. Established thinking patterns provide the bedrock for assessing new circumstances. Whether this an adequate basis to assess the present remains doubtful, since the geographical change was accompanied by a simultaneous restructuring and as such the 'old' SBS did not exist anymore after July 1997. The 'new' SBS is not a mere continuation of the old structures minus undergraduate provision, but has seen far reaching changes in the allocation of responsibilities.

The new building, the Business and Information Technology Centre (BITC) has become known in the vernacular language of the school as *the BITCH* (fieldnote 20 January 1998). Technically this is due to the fact that BITCH is offered as an option when spell-checking documents (an example of the structural metaphorical substitution process). As an image metaphor it is an expression of an emotive state of being, which expresses the frustration felt in particular during the first teaching semester in the new building. This frustration was not just caused by the insecurity of having to reorient oneself in a new environment and a new structure, aggravated by the beginning of a huge post-Dearing first year intake, but was caused by a feeling of not being treated as professional agents anymore, and as having been transformed to passive recipients of an overwhelming

structure: *In Dyson we had scruffy filing cabinets, scruffy book cases, but they served the purpose. An academic environment has books. Any way, all the storage facilities is a total waste of money. We want to walk into an academic environment with filing cabinets and book cases. We now are like an insurance company. We don't want to be like that. We need to create the environment whereby we can be true academics.* (Open meeting with assistant principal, a colleague, 10. September 1997). The change in the overall metonymic arrangement of the school results more specifically in a metonymical micro-change. Office space formerly defined by metonymically arranged filing cabinets, bookcases as to metaphorically mean *academic environment* has now been changed in such a way that the specific metonymical location comes to metaphorically mean *insurance environment*. Each metaphorically interpreted environment symbolises something different. The first symbolises the 'true' professional academic status, the scruffiness of which underlines rather than undermines the authenticity of the professional self. The second interpretation of the environment symbolises the 'insult' that was extended to staff by demoting their status to insurance clerks, functioning cogs in the machine. Bearing this in mind, the labelling of the building as BITCH reflects the deeply felt insult of the experience. In the fieldnotes taken in approximately August 1997 to October 1997 a multitude of instances recording emotions of anger, frustration, depression even were collected. Some of these might be expressants of a 'culture shock' associated with the change in the geographical and structural situation, the requirement to relearn taken-for-granted knowledge. Some of the remarks could be attributed to a certain fashion at the time to have yet another disaster story of malfunctioning printers, unavailable



support staff or missing teaching material to relate. Nevertheless, the metaphorical interpretation of the new metonymic environment reveals the underlying reason for the prevalent frustration amongst staff, which was the experience of having been deprived of their 'rightful' professional status.

### **Written Texts**

Jakobson (1956) has classified other cultural phenomena according to the metonymic and metaphorical distinction: "The dichotomy here discussed appears to be of primal significance and consequence for all verbal behaviour and for human behaviour in general." (p117). Jakobson paired cultural phenomena such as drama, montage, dream symbolism, surrealism, initiative magic, poetry, lyric, romanticism and symbolism (all metaphorical) with film, close-up, dream condensation and displacement, cubism, contagious magic, prose, epic, realism (all metonymic). To follow on from there, company documentation, reports, business plans etc. are realistic prose "forwarded essentially by contiguity, describing mainly logical relationships between concepts, entities or events. However, the combination of discrete items is almost entirely under the writer's control - which includes which items are deleted. The so-called realistic literature, tied with the metonymic principle, defies interpretation of metonymic structures in it, because the text as a whole is metonymic. The most appropriate response to the metonymic text is to restore the deleted details, to put the text back into the total context from which it derives. [in] pragmatic prose the selection of items is based on purely logical principles: what is *present* implies what is absent, the whole stands for the part, the

thing for its attributes, unless the part or attribute is itself vital to the message, in which case it is brought into the message as a whole, a thing in its own right.” (Lodge 1977: 93-94).

Based on these theoretical assumptions, an example of metonymic texts will be given and interpreted SBS Business Plan 1994/95: As pointed out in previous lines, a document such as a Business Plan defies interpretation, since the content "speaks for itself". In the order of contiguity and convention, an introduction is followed by general background information, the development strategy for the school as a whole, resource allocation, etc. It is difficult to argue with the logic of the written plan, an artifact (Hodder 1994) from the traditional engineering model of the business environment that can be appropriated for thinking about the school's future and which uses the language of objectivity, as most business plans do (Barnett 1996). Drawing on my insider perspective as well as some of the collected data, it is possible to point out some incongruities in the written text compared to the organisational realities as experienced by its members.

Under the Heading "Supporting Units and their Learning" the recent addition of Japanese and Portuguese to the other languages is described as an opportunity for both staff and students. Issues around the lack of financial investment into these new units for the development of teaching material, the establishment of contacts with university and employers, in particular in Japan, the establishment of placement opportunities for students and so on unfolded themselves in the year after the introduction of new languages



in the curriculum and caused worries for those in charge of implementing the decision. The announcement to expand one area of activity translated itself into concrete experiences at the workplace, which usually remain unheard of in the official texts of the organisation. Hodder (1994) calls written texts "mute evidence" (p. 393) of traditions and culture. However, following hermeneutic principles meaning is as much in the text as in the reading of it (Gadamer 1960). Texts are processes of signification only if read by an audience. The process of reading is a dynamic one from the text to the pre-understanding of the reader, back to the text (reception theory as developed by Iser 1978). My preunderstanding is informed by being an employee, a subordinate to those who wrote this text and who has witnessed the stress that was caused by this decision. However, many areas of experience are hidden from written language, particularly subordinate experience, which can either be disguised as informed vagueness: *The staffing policy of SBS is being developed around a desire to provide interesting and challenging work to all categories of staff and create an environment within which high performance can be achieved by individual professional staff and staff teams*, be itemised into categories (e.g. Annual Cycle of Strategic Planning and Resource Allocation Process Diagram) or remain silent. Assuming that the Business Plan is representative for the official, public side of the school, the way its logic unfolds can be used to infer back to how the writers, presumably the Director together with members of the executive, think and "speak" about the school they manage.

## Failed Artifact(s)

Not all artifact(s) prove to be successful and become part of the organisational routines (e.g. Schwartz 1990). Within SBS, an attempt was made to introduce identity cards (photograph, name of school and signature) for all staff. This had practical, i.e. security reasons, since the introduction coincided with the Queen's visit to Sheffield Hallam University. The tradition of portraits in itself in metonymic (face for the whole person) in Western civilisation (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:37). However, the ID cards were to be worn at all times when on university premises. As a matter of fact, I am aware of only one person within SBS that still wears it on a regular basis. The majority of members never really wore it at all. Thus, the ID card is a failed artifact(s) that was perceived to be "imposed" from "the Centre" (*I am not wearing one of these - who do they think I am, bloody clerk number three million?! Fieldnote, approximately June 1996*), a token of the introduction of a corporate, centralised way of life, bestowing corporate, rather than individual and/or professional identity. Again, whether the intent was actually to introduce an element of corporatism or whether the intent regarded security and safety reasons, shall be left open. It was interpreted as being an unjustified intrusion of the Centre. Similar attempts to display the photographs of all staff of SBS at all sites failed, since staff did not turn up for the photograph sessions, and quite openly refused to have their picture taken. The introduction of ID cards/photograph display, a metonymic device, was interpreted by the organisational members and became a symbol of corporatism incommensurable with the academic ethic.



With the move into the new building, the ID cards have been integrated with the library card and a Mondex card. Also, a new magnetic locking system necessitated the introduction of a plastic card to unlock the doors to the open plan areas. Both cards are usually worn around a metal chain that was distributed together with the cards. Although many colleagues do not 'wear' the cards openly, but keep them in pockets and handbags. The increase in the usefulness of the card(s) resulted in their widespread acceptance amongst organisational members, though the cards are viewed in terms of their usability rather than in terms of a control mechanism, which, naturally, they still are.

### **Theorising Metonymical Artifact(s)**

Previously, I have theorised linguistic metonymy as an expression of a particular organisational culture, which is caused by means of deletion and resulting in the expression of one item by another by means of (existential or causal) contiguity. Furthermore, often the metonymic trope deletes human agency. Also, I have understood physical setting and artifact(s) as instances of metonymy and conducted an analysis of SBS's metonymical arrangements. Just like words in a sentence are organised by metonymic (syntagmatic) principles, so are the physical settings of SBS. Space per se can tolerate various physical arrangements. The words of the language of SBS's setting are metonymically organised and "strung together" in a school-specific way. As with any organising system, it is possible to think of alternative arrangements. They are culturally learned and experienced, their use is conventional, rather than natural. The "proper order" is then the preferred or privileged scheme. If metonymical arrangements are viewed as

organising and finally culturally determined ordering principles, other organising practices (such as the organisation of staff into subject groups, or ranks and categories such as "research active", implying by its absence the "research inactive" group") are ways to metonymically arrange staff in an abstract notion of space. The organisation of time into hours and workloads is metonymically arranging time into abstract categories. The organisation of existential dimensions, time and space, is an expression of how cultural expectations and habitus structure the life experience of people in a Western civilisation in general, of a particular professional group (space structured into offices, time into workload hours), and of a particular organisational group (space organised into different buildings, time into a SBS specific system of allocating workload hours).

#### **4.5. Metaphor**

The second half of this structural analysis based on Saussure and Jakobson's theories will discuss examples of metaphorical tropes in organisational talk. As before, they will remain uncontextualised with regard to wider environmental discourses. However, some instances used in the previous part of this chapter will be drawn upon again, since both metaphorical and metonymical devices are combined in a structural way to generate meaning. Like metonymy metaphor implies a movement of meaning (Greek: *metaphorem* = to translate), but unlike metonymy it transfers meaning between two unrelated areas, therefore its functions and consequences are different from those of metonymy.



## **Instances of Structural Metaphors**

In two recent seminal contributions to the study of metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Ortony 1979 and 1993, 2nd.ed.) it is shown that metaphors pervade everyday language and life. They are concepts that structure and define realities - what is perceived, how one relates to the world and to other people. Lakoff and Johnson distinguish between conduit, orientational and ontological (entity and substance as well as container metaphors) metaphors. Having read Lakoff and Johnson, whose writings have informed many organisational theorists (e.g. Boland and Greenberg 1988, Grant and Osrick 1996, Mangham 1996), their categories provide a template against which the data was screened.

Some examples taken from the data for each category will be given in order to demonstrate how metaphors structure the ordinary conceptual system of language users, in which they think and act.

CONDUIT METAPHORS: Lakoff and Johnson (p.10) develop Reddy's (1979) reflections on language, which is seen as being structured by the following complex metaphor.

Ideas (or meanings) are objects.

Linguistic expressions are containers

Communication is sending .

If one speaks, one puts ideas (objects) into words (containers) and sends them (along a conduit) to a hearer who takes the idea/object out of the word/container. Some examples

are: *we need to get the message across more clearly that you can't spend what you have not earned; staff will not follow another set of rules without any sound academic sense; We have got the ideas. We now need to transform them into programmes; we have logged on a business plan; I find teaching more and more difficult these days. I don't want to force my ideas upon the students, but that's what they expect.* (Examples taken from fieldnotes between 1996 and 1997). The conduit metaphor in these examples is that understanding ideas in terms of objects, makes it possible to think of the activity of teaching as *forcing ideas upon students*, which is literally speaking not happening. The metaphorical thinking in these examples does not take any literal form, but is figurative in its very structure.

ORIENTATIONAL METAPHORS: organise a whole system of concepts with respect to one another. They are mostly spatial in orientation - reflecting the human bodily experience and its functioning in a physical environment. Examples, following on from Lakoff and Johnson/Reddy are:

HAPPY IS UP. SAD IS DOWN: *SBS is overtired and down. The whole school feels low. My spirits have been up since the research fellowship came along. The staff development system could do with a lift.*



CONSCIOUS IS UP. UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN: *We need to wake up to the fact, that ....., The programme needs to be up and running. He was under hypnosis when accepting the course leadership.*

HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP. SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN: *What if one school will go down. The undergraduate figures look quite healthy.*

HAVING CONTROL OR FORCE IS UP. BEING SUBJECT TO CONTROL OR FORCE IS DOWN: *X(name) is no longer in the upper echelon. I am only an L (lecturer), literally every member of my course team is above me. Staff below SAPs are usually unionised.*

MORE IS UP. LESS IS DOWN: *The number of students is going down. Our income levels in real terms have been falling. We need more time in our workload to reflect the effort. How come, your office is bigger than mine.*

FORESEEABLE FUTURE EVENTS ARE UP AND AHEAD: *What's ahead of us in terms of programme development.*

HIGH STATUS IS UP. LOW STATUS IS DOWN: *I am an associate lecturer, part time - bottom of the pile. I am afraid there are no more career ladders to climb. X (name) rose in status really quickly. X (name) moved up to the sixth floor since his promotion.*

GOOD IS UP. BAD IS DOWN: *We need to develop high quality researchers. The humdrum of teaching just gets me down this time of the year.*

VIRTUE IS UP. DEPRAVITY IS DOWN: *She has set herself high goals. X. (name) is quite upright as a person, but rather lacking in social skills. X's been treating Y really badly, since he got the negative report back from the BDO. The man's the pits.*

RATIONAL IS UP. EMOTIONAL IS DOWN: *Could we keep this discussion to the point and avoid becoming personal. X. is her own worst enemy. No control over her hysteria.*

(All taken from fieldnotes in 1996 and 1997).

As was the case of conduit metaphors, orientational metaphors are normally not noticed as being metaphorical structures. They have a basis in our physical experience in the world.: The opposition up-down, in-out etc. are physical in nature. The physical base for HAPPY IS UP. SAD IS DOWN is the slumped, drooping posture associated with depression, the erect posture of the positive thinker. The physical and social base for RATIONAL IS UP. EMOTIONAL IS DOWN. is that man (in Western civilisations) views himself as being in control over the natural world by dint of his ability to think rationally. CONTROL IS UP therefore is the basis for MAN IS UP and thus RATIONAL IS UP.



According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) metaphorical orientations are not entirely arbitrary in so far that they are linked to the human bodily experience. However, how this experience is interpreted is culture-bound, e.g. the privileging of the rational principle over emotional or holistic realities can be traced back far into the history of these civilisations (e.g. age of enlightenment). Hawkes (1972) follows on from Whorfian (1956) linguistic determinism and quotes him: "... that English contains metaphorical devices in its 'grammar' which impose a system of spatial and temporal relationships on objects and events (and these are part of 'brute fact' for us) which other languages, and other cultures, do not". (Language, Thought and Reality, pp. 134) Hawkes from there on develops a system of metaphorical ordering that comes very close to Lakoff and Johnson's later work.

"Our metaphors also unconsciously reflect a particular 'reality'. We speak of 'reaching' a 'point', 'coming to' or 'drawing' a conclusion, 'higher' education without recognising the implicit linear notions of movement, along a graduated path or 'up' a scale and 'towards' a 'goal', which these and similar structures metaphorically presuppose. And yet these presuppositions affect our lives as part of a 'reality' which exists, concretely, 'brutally' and 'out there' beyond us." (Hawkes 1972 : p.82). He then elaborates his point and frames the ordering system man uses for nature as being essentially metaphorical. He shows how the "Chain of Being" metaphor derived from Medieval-Elizabethan thinking, based on accepted thinking at the time, but how its hierarchies still influence the perception of hierarchies in the twentieth century. Following on from Hawkes today's main ordering metaphor is no longer the divine "Chain of Being", but the free market as the underlying

principle of ordering, according to which we speak and act (*The market will find us out* - open meeting, Director, 14 June 1996).

There are many possible bases, both physical and cultural for orientational metaphors.

Within one cultural system they are usually coherently used. Instances of incoherent usage (e.g. RATIONAL IS LIMITED: *I find his rational outlook rather infuriating at times.*

Fieldnotes, a colleague, date remained unrecorded) can be taken as instances of criticism

or possible indicators of a subculture. However, in total, no individual can continuously

defy the dominant (cultural) use of language and maintain that RATIONAL IS DOWN.

LESS IS MORE. HAVING CONTROL IS DOWN etc. In extreme cases communication

and interaction would become impossible. In less extreme cases, language speakers who

defy the privileged organisational idioms and rhetoric become marginalised, leave the

organisation, form their own subcultures. This is because the most fundamental values in

a culture are coherent with the metaphorical structure (e.g. MORE IS UP = MORE IS

BETTER). Denying these metaphorical structures equals denying the cultural values of a

society or an organisation. Consistently querying the prerogative of rational reason will

not further the status of an organisational member in an organisation or society in which

this is a deeply embedded value. However, it is the critical querying of these metaphorical

linkages that might initiate change. Similarly, the frustration of a value-based anticipation

such as THE FUTURE WILL BE BETTER (MORE) by lack of career opportunities and

"climbing the ladder" is therefore not only to be understood as a denial of individual

career aspirations, but as a violation of deeply embedded values, which organisational



members think in and live by. In turn, this observation can explain the emotiveness that issues around promotion usually trigger off.

ONTOLOGICAL METAPHORS: Entity metaphors allow us to understand experience in terms of objects. Substance metaphors allow us to take some part of the experience and treat it as a discrete entity: “once we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorise them, group them, and quantity them and by this means, reason about them” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 25). As with orientational metaphors, so our experience with physical objects, especially our own bodies, provide the way for viewing events, activities, emotions etc. as entities and substances. The experience of working a certain period of a contractually agreed amount of time for an organisation can be metaphorically viewed as an entity via the noun "workload". This opens a way of referring to the experience as: Workload is an entity. Therefore workload can be expressed as *My workload is making me ill. The nature of our workload is changing. Compared to last year my workload is down. Keeping course leaders sweet is the best way to maintain your workload. How come, X (name) is allowed to buy 25% of his own workload for his consultancy work?* (Fieldnotes taken in 1996 and 1997).

Viewing 'workload' as an entity allows us to quantify it, identify particular aspects of it, compare it etc., it allows the speakers to understand their experience better. Also, by describing the experience as workload, the experience is further elaborated as a 'load', indicating in the very sign the separation of leisure and working hours, with the experience of working for an organisation being conceptualised as a burden.

Container Metaphors: are related to the previously discussed metaphors in so far as they are not immediately noticeable in language and that they are linked to our physical existence, “bounded and set off from the rest of the world by the surface of our skins, and we experience the rest of the world as outside us. Each of us is a container, with a bounding surface and an in-out orientation” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 29). This orientation is projected on to other physical objects, which are bounded by surfaces. Thus, buildings, rooms, offices are "containers" which we move into and out of. Their volume marks the boundaries of territories, the definition of which is an act of claiming a territory. Expanding the notion of bounded objects to abstract constructs such as a group or a team (e.g. subject group, course team) in which one is either "in" or "out", and which define an organisational territory. The notion of territoriality becomes evident in references to subject groups as *my patch* or *our farm* as one subject leader put it. Also, the importance of the container/group/territory connection comes to light when intending to move from one group to another. With regard to my own position within SBS I intended to change my belongings and join another subject group, because of the route my professional development had taken. This change of "container", rather than being a matter of work practicalities became a conflict involving several parties (and which resulted in a lengthy interesting, though precarious, "sitting on a fence" position of territorial uncertainty for myself) “All margins are dangerous. If they are pulled ... this way and that the shape of fundamental experience is altered.” (Douglas 1980).



Discussion of Metaphorical Structures: Structural metaphors form a basic conceptual level which organisational members live by and act in. It is not possible to "escape" these structures since they are embedded in (the English) language. The metaphorical orientation is linked to our physical experience in the world. The interpretation of this experience is culture-bound. Using structural metaphors this experience can be quantified, referred to and reasoned about. Furthermore, structural metaphors express values which guide the behaviour of people.

The examples of organisational talk that were used to demonstrate how the metaphorical structures of the English speaking world pervade organisational thinking and action.

These structural metaphors are not specific to a particular organisation (as the previously discussed metonymies were), they are the bedrock within which more specific cultural milieus are set.

### **Image Metaphors**

More obvious than structural metaphors in so far as they explicitly link different domains, image metaphors constitute the focus of interest in the organisation theory literature.

Image metaphors are usually meant by the authors discussing organisational metaphors.

(see for example Dunford and Palmer 1996 on the restricting of organisations in managerial discourse, Höpfl and Maddress 1996 on illusion of religion and dream in an organisational setting). They are more obvious to perceive, but like structural metaphors imply a movement of meaning between two unrelated areas. The selected image

metaphors will be discussed in their own right, but if relevant, structural metaphors will be used to elaborate the interpretation. In the research process I found two dominant image metaphors.

TIME IS MONEY: Time in a business oriented commercial culture is a commodity.

Within SBS this becomes particularly apparent in the way time is broken down into hours, which are the currency in which staff time is bought and sold and many budgets are measured in. If time is money, hours are the school's currency. The two different areas (time and money) have sufficient commonality to be used in a metaphor. Both can be used to conceptualise our experience as a limited resource and valuable commodities. The tenor or topic (time) and the vehicle (money) of the metaphor (Richards 1936) share sufficient ground for the metaphor to be meaningful. Time is understood in terms of money, because both can be viewed as commodities and limited resources. Literally speaking, time, of course, is not money. Time cannot be touched, it cannot be stored in an account etc. However, expressions such as "to save time", or "what a waste of time and money" demonstrate how interlinked the two concepts have become in our thinking. With regards to organisational talk sentences such as *we need to claw back these hours from the public sector group; we are fiddling with silly little hours; there are no more hours left in my budget, a full time member of staff costs me £70 an hour* (fieldnotes 1996 and 1997) and many similar instances encapture time as a valuable commodity and as an exchange value.



Structurally speaking, this quantifying and reasoning about time is only possible, because the experience of time is viewed as an entity (*I have to put 250 hours into this subject group*, fieldnotes, a colleague, 12 June 1996): the 250 hours are the substance to be put into [orientational metaphor] the container [subject group]. Apart from these metaphorical structures, other images are used to further define 'time' and associated practices. Many references to *bean counting* and *silly hours*, *silly little hours* were noted in the data. Most commonly used the *bean counting* image evoked a tedious and impractical activity, that organisational members engage in to *boost their workload and claim overtime* (open meeting, a colleague, 17 June 1996). The bean counting image is used in the school context to describe an unworthy, time-wasting activity, driven by lowly ambitions. As a worthy counterpart a *reasonable workload* (open meeting, a colleague, 17 June 1996) is being used. Here, time is measured as a total load, rather than being broken down and counted in smaller units (hours/beans). Value judgement about correct and incorrect behaviour are inherent in the two metaphors - even though the accumulation of hours by organisational members follows the MORE IS BETTER cultural imperative. A fact, hinted at by one interviewee: *Well, it's a bit of a shame really, I would prefer not to do it, but I do try and claim the money these days, even just for a handful of hours. ... So, if they're committed to this, if it's profit-making, everything we did before, cause we were committed to it, we now do it for money* (experienced colleague, interview, 7 June 1996). In this quote the accumulation of hours/money is following the management rationale (*they*) of being committed to profit: If management introduced the "beans", staff might as well count them.

Similarly, expressions such as to *claw back hours* frame hours as valuable commodities to be aggressively reclaimed from other groups: hours as property to be fought over. On the other hand, references to workloads as being *burdensome*, *being strapped up in very high teaching loads*, *I am being squeezed to death by my workload* are frequent both in informal talk (fieldnotes 1996 and 1997) as well as during meetings regarding staff planning. The metaphorical evocation of work being an enslaving burden is mainly done when discussing teaching hours (rather than research activities). Though, most recently, disappearing teaching hours caused concern among staff: *workloads are just disappearing. It is frightening, I hear they are doing the same now in the postgraduate portfolio as they did for cycle one and two - well, that's another 25% of teaching hours gone, the idiocy of all this is that I am working as hard - or harder - as last year, but I am still under hours. I am really worried that one of these days a finger will point to me and say 'you are surplus to requirement'* (interview with friend/colleague, 17 December 1996). Again, hours are viewed as a valuable, quantifiable commodity, that is a measurement of work activities, but not similar to the experience of work itself. Hours can be manipulated by changing remission hours for designated activities, thus reducing the overall workload by metaphorically speaking "saving hours". Literally speaking, this is not possible and the experience of carrying out responsibilities at work becomes more exhausting, while at the same time the person feels threatened by a possible redundancy (the metonymical 'finger' that metaphorically points at my friend, symbolised a disembodied powerful threat).



The way time is conceptualised in terms of money informs the organisational talk and activities in a very profound way. Evidently, these conceptualisations are not exclusive to SBS, but tied to the culture of modern (post)industrial society. It is possible to think about time in a way different from the above. From data taken from the "Experienced Colleague" interviews it can be suggested that the time/money metaphor has not always been as prominent in the school's conceptual framework as today, although the wider cultural and societal milieus are run by this metaphorical concept. Its underlying base are the concepts, principles and values of business and commerce and their activities (budgeting, investing, planning etc.) are the domain of management.

Business in turn is not merely a cost-covering or profit-seeking activity, it is metaphorically framed as a competition, a game and war - these three are often used together e.g. in competitive game, war game, competitive team spirit, which form the second dominant metaphor.

LIFE IS A GAME: When reading the data I was amazed by how many references to games and playing were made. It is quite common to speak about *the goalposts for promotion; Our position in the league table; we are only in the third division* (fieldnotes 1996 and 1997) or *you can't just stop the game and put our hand up and shout to the referee 'hey, he's been off side', while the others are scoring goals. I mean, shouting to the referee won't help. You've got to get on with the game.* (Course leader meeting, 21 May

1996). Life in an academic institution is compared to a football (or similar) game that is conducted on a competitive basis. As before, the metaphor between the affairs of academic life and a football match share sufficient ground to be generally acceptable. Secondly, in particular in the referee quote, they allow the speaker to express an idea that would otherwise be more difficult to articulate. In this case, the metaphor brings to life the passion, sweat and possible emotive and therefore misleading decision the players might make in the heat of the moment. The particular quality of metaphor evokes characteristics which are otherwise unnameable or would be too time-consuming to describe. Ortony (1975) calls this the inexpressibility thesis. However, the details which the individual hearer of the message actually infer about the football match is beyond the speaker's control. The process of filling in the details between linguistic signs present in the message is called particularisation by Ortony. Nevertheless, comprehension of the metaphor becomes possible, because all speakers/listeners know enough about league football to classify it as a competitive game, as well as about the school's situation at this particular moment in time to make the football/referee metaphor successful to the communication. Just like "time", "game" could be conceptualised differently. After the meeting in which the football/referee metaphor was used, I discussed the proceedings with a friend/colleague. Our particularisation of football/game was as follows: *It's funny, but when we play football it's not really about scoring at all. I mean, can you actually remember who won last week? It's just brilliant if it's a beautiful game.* (Course leader post-meeting talk, May 1996). Conceptually speaking, "game" is based on a purposeless pursuit of a physically and aesthetically pleasing experience. Although in the context of



the meeting, this particularisation was not activated by either of us, subordinating our thinking to the dominant metaphor, which in this instance constrained other notions of "game". However, it did come closer to successfully summarising the charged emotional reality of the meeting (discussing budget implications and the school's relationship to the central administration) than a game/aesthetical metaphor could have come. The vividness thesis says: "(...) a metaphor's greater proximity to perceived experience and consequently its greater vividness, the emotive as well as the sensory and cognitive aspects are more available ... . Metaphors come closer to emotional reality for the same reason that they are closer to perceptual experience. To say of an unexpected event that it was a miracle is to say far more than that it was inexplicable: It is to express joy, admiration, wonder, awe and a host of other things without mentioning any of them." (Ortony 1975: 50 - 51). In the specific context of this meeting the referee metaphor was used in an intelligent way, articulating the emotional reality of the "players", who at this moment of the meeting were coming close to making emotive decisions while losing sight of the overall aim. This instance demonstrates how the (football) game/competition metaphor was adjusted to a specific context. It was used to supplement knowledge about some already quite well understood topic. The user of the metaphor assumed the addressees' knowledge about football. Like structural metaphors, this image is culture-bound, albeit to a more specific culture - that of an industrialised society engaged in competitive recreational activities. As earlier on, Kittay's (1987) default assumptions, here being special background (meeting, relationship with Centre) default assumptions, and general background default

assumptions (football game) can be used to describe cultural phenomena inherent in language and language use.

The *goalposts* for promotion refers to the same general game metaphor and is a concise way of referring to a "chunk of unspecified features " (Ortony 1975:48) of what is meant by goal post (exact guidelines and lists of achievements needed for a promotion to a particular level in the organisational hierarchy). As before, the addressee needs to particularise goalpost and does so guided by cultural assumptions (compactness thesis, Ortony 1975).

Just like (football) game metaphors there are recurrent usage of the war image as a way of portraying the school's situation. Issues are *flagged up*, courses (some) are *flagship courses*, teaching is *front line work*, teaching is *delivered*, attitudes are *entrenched*, older members of staff have *ring fenced themselves*, *there will be casualties* (about devolution), *weaker schools might go the wall*, *there will be winners and looser* (war game metaphor), *a message to the troops from the principal*, *I am but a humble foot soldier* (fieldnotes 1996 and 1997; documentation). Similarly, there is plenty of talk about aggressive marketing, attacking positions, defensive behaviour etc. It could be said that within a business school, war metaphors are plentiful since one of its "highest" discipline - strategy- has its origins in the strategies of war as articulated by generals. Again, Ortony's theorising on metaphorical compactness, particularisations, vividness and inexpressibility are helpful to understand the usage of the war imagery. An expression such as *there will*



*be casualties* contains many possible particularisations in terms of the concrete images that are conjured up in peoples' minds. Compactly and vividly, the seriousness and life threatening situation of the university/school is portrayed, while at the same time expressing the potential danger, which to describe in mere fact and figures would not express the fear of casualties and the determination, heroism even, that is needed to avoid them without mentioning them explicitly. In this respect the war imagery implicitly uses notions of romanticism and heroism in my particularisation. Similarly, the use of *message to the troops* puts the principal into the position of the general. *I am but a humble foot soldier* puts a member of staff into the position of a subordinate at the bottom of the military hierarchy - expressing a positional fact as much as a value judgement (BOTTOM IS LOW - see discussion of structural metaphors). The war imagery is commonly used throughout the school, the university and in the field of business, although on the private and individual level many academic members of staff defy its authority: *But you know people insist on talking about fierce competition, it's the idea that all business schools in the whole sector are fighting against each other. That makes me cringe a bit and I think, we are all part of the higher education sector and a measure of co-operation is called for.* (Newcomer interview 2 February 1996). In terms of the war/fight imagery the metaphor is queried in so far as the tenor-vehicle commonality is not sufficient to vividly compress what higher education is about - implying that to achieve its objectives co-operation rather than exaggerated competition is required.

Every metaphor contains an element of "tension" (Ortony 1975), because it expresses a literal experience/fact/object metaphorically, i.e. time is not really money, higher education is not really a battle field (though one could find linguistic evidence that higher education has become a real business, in which case the business metaphor is turned literal). Each metaphor contains an element of incongruity (Kittay 1987), a dissimilarity (Lodge 1977). If the particularisation of a metaphor becomes too tension-ridden, i.e. the literal and the metaphorical element do not overlap sufficiently, a metaphor can be rejected or criticised. In the case of the war metaphor I met with many instances of personal uneasiness with regard to the conceptual understanding of Higher Education in term of (business and) war: Business is war, Higher Education is business. Higher Education is war. However, with regard to the collective usage of the war imagery, there is no doubt about its predominance, even to the extent that many of its images (*to flag up, entrenched, flagship course, front line work*) have become an engrained part of the organisational language and are now "dead" metaphors. Dead metaphors "become so familiar and so habitual that we have ceased to become aware of their metaphorical nature and use them as *literal* terms". (Tsoukas 1991: 568). I do not agree with Tsoukas' verdict that "dead" metaphors do not offer any insights into understanding organisational phenomena such as training, development, leadership and motivation (Tsoukas 1991:569).

Reflecting on the notion of teaching being *front line work* might offer some insights about the impact on teaching practices based on this particular conceptualisation. This could then lead to an informed discussion about the communality/incongruity between



tenor and vehicle in this metaphor and whether it is an appropriate image to describe the classroom work with students as *front line work*.

Similarly, the business metaphor with its talk about client and customers (rather than students or learners), markets, TQM, quality control have become part of everyday talk and activities, underneath which lie the conceptual understanding of education as a business activity. This paradigmatic shift is causing concern for many academics and is echoed in the public debate as a concern about quality in education and how to measure it.

However, the principal "truth" of the business metaphor is generally accepted and its images are used even by those members, who find too many incongruities in it to be an appropriate basis for thinking about the needs of students and lecturers alike. The use of its signs and metaphors cannot be escaped, though some members of staff seek refuge in the use of **irony** when using business/management terms.

During an appointment day for a post for a foreign language lecturer on a business studies programme, mistakes in the co-ordination of the day had been made (candidates had not been informed that their presentation had to be in the foreign language, the timing of the informal and formal interview overlapped in many cases, the schedule for lunch overlapped with the last interview schedule) and the following comment made by the Head of the Foreign Language Unit, though charged with anger and frustration, still used elements of irony: *For heaven's sake, they give themselves fancy titles like interview co-ordinator, but "piss up" and "brewery" spring to mind eternally. What's wrong with actually being a competent secretary?* The 'fancy title' is put into opposition with

'competent secretary' . The combination of the vernacular (piss up, brewery) together with more poetic expressions (spring to mind eternally in analogue to hope springs eternally) result in an ironisation of the practice of putting title over substance (competence). The use of the simple present tense (they give themselves titles) indicates the ongoing widespread habit of awarding titles without substance rather than blaming the hapless clerical assistant. Leech (1987) calls this an unrestrictive use of the simple present. It places no limitations on the extension of the state into past and future time. During the same day the candidates were inducted briefly by the Head of the Foreign Language Unit.

After an introduction to the language activities of the school, he continued *all these activities are managed, of course. Everyone in the school is a leader. [facetiously] We have course leaders. Susanne over there is a course leader. There are subject leaders, Bert is a subject leader, and there are route leaders and so on. So if Susanne wants some German for her course, she will talk to Bert. - Not, that this has got anything to do with German* (approximately February 1996). By putting the term 'leader' into quotation marks (initially he used his fingers to do this) an ironic comment about the notion of leadership (or lack of it) is evoked. It is also pointed out that the mechanics of the internal market contribute little to the academic discipline itself; thus, satirising the privileging of the internal market processes over the academic discipline itself.

Burke (1941) in his essay on the four master tropes would have called this instance one of “romantic irony” (p. 434), in which an attitude of humility (*not that this has got anything to do with German*) arises from an opposition to the cultural imperative (the superiority of the market mechanism). However, the humility is not ‘true’ humility, since the speaker



considers himself outside of and superior to the role he is rejecting, i.e. playing a part in the market mechanism. Burke claims that “True irony, however, irony that really does justify the attribute of ‘humility’, is not ‘superior’ to the enemy.” (Burke 1941: 434).

True, humble irony is based upon a sense of fundamental kinship with the enemy, as “one needs him, is indebted to him is not merely outside him as an observer but contains him within, being consubstantial to him.” (Burke 1941: 434 - 435). An example of an ironic wit is demonstrated by one member of the executive group within old SBS, whose ironic-critical comments were never directly towards members of staff, but always subtly shaded and thus shedding light on the working of the group itself - of which he, of course, was an intrinsic part. This would be “dialectic irony” (Burke 1941: 435), i.e. irony and humility, since this manager was simultaneously both outside the group and within it.

Thus, within the context of an executive meeting (26 March 1996) dialectic irony was activated during a discussion: *Of course, we would never jump to conclusions in a rash manner.* By using the pronoun *we* the speaker includes himself into the criticism of the decision-making process, thus inviting a more critical stance with regard to the established group behaviour (Cartwright 1968). Of course, the dilemma of the commentator is that irony and self - and group - depreciation or modesty are seen as entirely inappropriate in a group, whose dominant modes of discourse do not encompass the possibility of irony or critical self-reflection. In the meetings I observed no one of the efforts to increase the group’s self-awareness were taken up by other members.

Previously I discussed the physical setting of SBS as instances of school-specific metonymical structures. Buildings, in particular, are referred to metaphorically as well. Dyson house as *Dirty Dyson, shithole, the pits or the machine*. (fieldnotes) The Totley Campus as *Sleepy Hollow* or the *Old Hall* as *up there*. Though *Dirty Dyson* is a metaphor not defined by a huge amount of tension between the literal and the figurative, since Dyson House is a rather run down, overcrowded office building in need of sound proofing and a new ventilation system, the adjective "dirty" (chosen perhaps because of the playful alliteration) also refers to the nature of the work that is carried out there (metonymical device), mainly undergraduate teaching. The transfer of meaning by contiguity is of course a metonymical structure by which the building comes to stand for the nature of the work carried out in it: Undergraduate teaching and management are described in terms of Morgan's (1986) machine metaphor: *I am not sorry to miss the treadmill of cycle one and two and the routine of turning over fast semesters. I am not sorry to miss the changes of the next few years, which undoubtedly will increase the speed of the production arm. They might give you better spanners, just might. If the Learning and Teaching Institute works you might get some better spanners*. (interview with retired lecturer, 11 July 1996).

Here the image of smoothly running operations is evoked, against the "treadmill" comparison which has a worrying undertone (*I am not sorry to miss*). By many of the Dyson-based staff the "nitty-gritty" reality of the machine is given higher ontological status than the mellow pastures in Totley. This is obvious in the references to Dyson as being *the real world, welcome to the real world, want to do some real teaching, John? Join my 4th year BP class*, (fieldnotes 1996) although ontologically speaking



things/experiences are either "real" or "not real" and grammatically speaking there is no comparative form to "real". However, in the school's mind ontological hierarchies are active concepts.

Similarly, members based in Totley and exclusively involved in postgraduate/experience and research work claim a higher status based on Morgan's (1986) organism metaphor, since they work in an increasingly turbulent wider environment to which the school needs "to adapt" by knowing its customers and anticipating their needs. Their 'privileged' status derives from their *closeness to fee paying clients* (experienced colleague interview, 9 July 1996). Metaphorically labelling Totley as *Sleepy Hollow* (by Dyson House staff) indicates the gap between the nitty-gritty industrial reality in Sheffield's City Centre as compared to the pastoral sleepiness of the rural campus.

### **Theorising Metaphors**

Following an inductive approach (other examples of this approach are Dunford and Palmer 1996, Doving 1996, Brammer and Vine 1996) as opposed to a deductive approach where a metaphorical framework is applied to an organisational setting in order to deepen the analysis of organisational issues (e.g. Morgan 1986, Clar and Salaman 1996, Broekstra 1996), I have distinguished between structural and image metaphors. Structural metaphors are "inevitable" in so far as they are interlinked with language and by talking we are using metaphorical (and metonymical) structures. Lakoff and Johnson's work (1980) has informed the analysis of structural metaphors, which functions actively in

Western/English speaking civilisations and forms the basis of understanding the world, as well as being expressants of cultural values. Structural metaphors make it possible to conceive the world, refer to our experience in it and allow human agents to reason, quantify, compare and argue about their experiences.

Structural metaphors have more than just a referential function, they contribute to and further understanding. Within the suggested typology (structural and image metaphors) structural metaphors are understood to be the most basic ones. They are, together with metonymy, language and the basis of human conceptualisation and thinking. Image metaphors can be more readily recognised as figures of speech, although they, too, are deeply engrained in language, but based on more specific default assumptions (professional default assumptions, situation specific default assumptions). The image metaphors fulfil various roles: They give expression to the emotional state of the users and their audience (this is an aspect they share with poetic language) and express the inexpressible (Ortony 1975, 1993, Chia 1996). However, they do not provide new information or knowledge, rather they draw on tacit knowledge and channel the experience into more familiar images. Grant and Osrick (1996) advance that metaphors can actually constrain knowledge, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) refer to this that metaphors "hide" certain aspects of the vehicle. In this respect using metaphorical language (e.g. in rhetoric) could be used to manipulate the life experience of organisational members. An example of this manipulative aspect is the manipulation of the experience of work via its metaphorical conceptualisation within the TIME IS MONEY metaphor and further images



(workload, to save hours). On the other hand, on the positive status (Grant and Oswick 1996) it can be said that metaphors are an *invitation to see the world anew* (Barrett and Cooperrider 1990: 222), i.e. pre-conceptions about a particular phenomenon may be radically altered by the application of a new metaphor.

In this regard, my own long socialisation process made me see the phenomena (Education) within a new metaphorical frame: The purposeless game of learning and teaching turned into the goal-driven game of business and warfare. The same sign 'game' implies different particularisation. Particularisation together with the incongruity aspect of metaphors make it possible that metaphors can be interpreted in different ways - depending on context and individual preconceptions involved. Schön (1993) within the context of urban planning, warns of the inherent danger of metaphors in so far as the way of conceiving a situation constrains the set of problem solutions (frame conflict). In this a metaphorical frame creates its own solution according to the imagery of the metaphor. If then a metaphor becomes dominant - it will generate solutions to its own structures, which become to be culturally accepted as 'true'. The "truth" of a particular metaphor may become part of the received wisdom and uncritical accepted knowledge, metaphors can take an ideological turn.

#### **4.6. The Interplay of Metaphor and Metonymy**

In this section I use various instances of organisational talk and artifact(s) to show how organisational symbolism is created. Organisational symbolism has been theorised

extensively (seminal contributions are Pondy et al 1983, Alvesson and Berg 1992, Gagliardi 1990) , but I have not come across any discussions of the actual process of the constitution of symbols. An analysis of language, the first and most important symbolic sign system, provides insights into how symbolism is created.

I shall venture that **Organisational Symbols result from metonymic processes of combination and deletion on the basis of physical or causal contiguity, which are metaphorically arranged and interpreted by organisational members as being symbolic for their experience within the organisation.**

Examples for this process are: WE NEED SOME YOUNG BLOOD COMING IN. The sign BLOOD is here a metonymical device, synecdochially putting the part (blood) for the whole organism (person). YOUNG is a metaphorical sign, stressing the need for reducing the age profile of the institution. Together, metonymy and metaphor come to signify the organisational need for new energy and ideas as a life supporting source (blood) for the organism (organisation). YOUNG BLOOD symbolised an organisation's existential dependency on a constant input of new ideas.

In WE NEED TO COVER OUR BACKS, backs is the metonymical device, created by physical association between the whole (body) and the part (back). To COVER ONE'S BACK is an association taken from the (guerrilla) warfare imagery, in which the enemy (in the meeting the enemy was alternatively particularised as either students or management) sneak up to attack from behind. The dialectical connection between



metonymical structure and metaphorical interpretation comes to symbolise

VULNERABILITY (Back being the most unprotected area of the human body) of the lecturer faced with the demanding student body. The vividness of the war metaphor reflects the hidden emotiveness of this symbolic statement.

A FINGER WILL POINT TO ME SAYING depersonalises the process of pointing by means of deleting the rest of the body, while combining it with the metaphor of singling the speaker out. Together, they come to symbolise the threat exercised by a disembodied power.

In THE OLD HALL HAS DUMPED THIS ON US the Old Hall stands by physical contiguity for "the executive", which is a condensation of the notional sentence "The members of the executive team met in the Old Hall and decided to implement a certain decision" by means of deletion. The metaphor to DUMP in this figure of speech draws on similarity of movement: top-down symbolising a hierarchical process, as well as on the dissimilarity (to dump: abase, be disrespectful, disdain) expressing an evaluative judgement, disgust even (dump: sty, receptacle of filth). THE OLD HALL HAS DUMPED THIS ON US symbolises the workings of a disrespectful (to academic members of staff) oligarchy.

DIRTY DYSON and SLEEPY HOLLOW: are metonymical figures, interpreted by organisational members according to the machine or organism metaphor and their ontological status.

Artifact(s) of the internal physical arrangement of the school, such as the PHOTOCOPY MACHINE come to symbolise the hierarchical watershed between those who photocopy

and those WHO HAVE SLAVES TO DO IT. The photocopy machine came to symbolise the hierarchical divide, but also - within a different metaphorical framework -it comes to symbolise the excesses of irresponsible academic behaviour (*flippant*). On the other hand, some artifact(s) (e.g. identity cards) do not achieve any lasting symbolic value and are forgotten.

Written texts such as BUSINESS PLANS in a similar vein are "a slice of life", metonymic in character and defy interpretation. However, as Lodge (1977) observes: "the metonymic text (...) deluges us with a plethora of data which we seek to unite into one meaning (...) ..., the metonymic text cannot eliminate all signs that it is *available* for metaphorical interpretation. (p. 111). Thus, metonymic texts must ultimately be interpreted by their readers: What is this text about? By asking this question, the metonymic text is converted into a total metaphor. What is the BUSINESS PLAN about? It is about rationalising and objectifying the organisational experience, both internal and external. The metonymical BUSINESS PLAN metaphorically interpreted (my own interpretation) symbolises for me: RATIONALITY.

With regard to constructed abstracts such as WORKLOAD or SUBJECT GROUP, they, too, can be seen in term of their symbolic value, which results from metonymical and metaphorical processes. The sign WORKLOAD expresses the experience of working for an organisation, fulfilling many complex activities on its behalf and so forth. All this experience is metonymically deleted and condensed into the sign WORKLOAD. By dint of this condensation WORKLOAD becomes an entity and can be reasoned about



metaphorically. Symbolically speaking, it can have multiple meanings being a BURDEN, a COST FACTOR, a disappearing commodity symbolising potential REDUNDANCIES. These multiple symbols in turn are often captured in image metaphors (to strip staff in high teaching loads, to claw back hours).

Similarly, a SUBJECT GROUP is a group of people who conduct certain organisational activities in their area. The experience of being a member of a subject group, and teaching, researching, consulting and administrating socialising and partying within its boundaries, is metonymically abbreviated into the sign SUBJECT GROUP. By metaphorical processes it becomes possible to view it as a container, "into which one has to put hours", symbolising the INTERNAL MARKET MECHANISM, or if viewed as territory it symbolises OWNERSHIP both individual (*my patch*) and group (*our farm*) (fieldnotes, 3 April 1997). Groups can also be viewed as part of the organisational structure, as part of "the matrix". In this respect an organigram is a metonymic metaphor, symbolising the OFFICIAL RELATIONSHIPS between organisational members.

Other than Barley (1983), I have not found any reference to the dialectics between metaphor and metonymy resulting in symbolism in the organisation theory literature. Lodge (1977) applied his theorising to literary texts, Dérényi (1996) to literary strategy, emphasising the power of metonymy as an ordering device. The linguists Lakoff and Johnson (1980) do forge the link between metaphor and metonymy (though in total their work concentrates on metaphor. Metonymy takes but one chapter in their book):

“Symbolic metonymies are critical links between everyday experience and the coherent metaphorical systems that characterise religions and cultures. Symbolic metonymies that are grounded in our physical experience provide an essential means of comprehending *religions* and cultural concepts” (p.40). As an example they use DOVE, which within Christianity metonymically symbolised the HOLY SPIRIT. Metaphorically interpreted, the dove “flies gracefully, glides silently, and is typically seen coming out of the sky and landing among people.” (p.40). Both, metonymy and metaphor are interpreted within cultural frameworks, drawing on default assumptions.

In the discussion of organisational talk and artifact(s), several cultural layers were distinguished. I have argued that the metonymical structuring of physical settings, in particular the Dyson-Totley divide is specific to SBS. The different interpretations of the metonymical array can only be understood by someone familiar with the physical setting. Furthermore, I suggested that other levels of cultural interpretation (Alvesson and Berg 1992) are drawn on by default assumption to generate meaning for organisational members. The values and images of an industrialised society are drawn upon when discussing organisational affairs (e.g. in football metaphor, in mechanic and organic metaphors). Furthermore, speakers of the English language inevitably share its structuring devices, which organise their experience. This forms the most general level of cultural interpretation. However, how these structures and images are particularised is beyond the control of the language speaker, which constitutes a liberating element of language and culture. Thus, metaphor and metonymy structures are strong integrative devices (Geertz



1973, Schein 1983), without which shared meanings would not be possible. Within the context of organisation theory Meyerson and Martin (1988, 1994) call this the integrative paradigm, which emphasises consistency across cultural manifestations, consensus among cultural members, and usually focus on leaders as culture creators (e.g. Deal and Kennedy 1982, Peter and Waterman 1982, Schein 1983).

In this structuralist analysis I have found many instances of shared cultural understanding, without which joint talk and action would be impossible. Equally, there are many instances that defy the consensus. Any example of irony is deviating from the official consensus. Other instances point to the appropriation of management jargon to get one's way or compliance, rather than internalisation, of organisational norms (Kelman 1961). Thus, although the meta-cultural frameworks (feeder cultures) of the school are shared and inform the cultural milieu of the school, the integrative paradigm does not suffice to explain cultural phenomena. The assumptions of a common language need to be qualified, when it becomes clear that signs carry different meanings in different contexts (e.g. game example). These indicates the existence of different interpretations (differentiation paradigm). Also, meaning is shifting and ambiguous (ambiguity paradigm), organisational members draw on several, sometimes contradictory, assumptions when interpreting talk.

Making the common-sense visible (Garfinkel 1967) by showing how it is constructed and in how far it relies on “unnoticed” background expectancies of default assumptions is

achievable by analysing the tropes, because they relate meaning domains in a (seemingly) common-sensical way. Notwithstanding the intellectual debt owed to the insights of ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967, Sharrock and Anderson 1986) the tools of this analysis is different. My analysis concentrates on tropes as the investigating tools to understand sense-making processes.

For any analysis using tropes as an investigating tool, noun-cum-verb constructions (i.e. metonymy/noun cum metaphorical verb, adverb or adjective) are a particularly helpful starting point. In examples such as *The Old Hall has dumped this on us*, *SBS is tired and worn out*, the investigation of the tacit knowledge implicit in the metonymy figure will reveal insights into the taken-for-granted assumptions of organisational members. The metaphorically used verb will provide insight into how this knowledge is operationalised, how one domain of knowledge (captured in the metonymy) is linked to other domains (captured in the metaphor). This is how meanings become linked and established as 'true' and 'normal'.

#### **4.7. Summary and Critique**

In this chapter I have examined closely and discussed instances of organisational talk and other semiotic systems with the help of structuralist theories as developed by the linguists Saussure, Jakobson and later in this century by Lakoff and Johnson. I have found that metaphorical and metonymical structures are indeed the bedrock of all language, including organisational talk and artifact(s). By applying structuralism's tenets to organisational talk



and artifact(s) I found that metaphorical and metonymical processes are interlinked dialectically as to produce symbolism. **Organisational symbolism results from the simultaneous interaction of metonymy (combination and deletion based on contiguity) and metaphorical (combination of two different domains) processes, which are interpreted by organisational members by dint of activating shared default assumptions. Different layers of default assumptions can be distinguished (from the most general civilisation layer to the most specific organisational layer) as well as instances of deviating interpretation of cultural assumptions.**

These theoretical considerations are grounded in the data itself. There was no intent, no instinctive or intellectual hunch, to address the question of how (organisational) tropes are constituent of and constituted by sense-making processes. By a process of immersing myself in the data, thinking about what signs are and how they work together, as well as reading relevant linguistic theories and studies conducted in the previous twenty years, a concept gradually emerged, which I "tested out" to see whether it worked for more examples of organisational talk.

I consider part of the research focus as formulated in chapter 3 to have been addressed and satisfactorily addressed. Viz., by conducting an analysis inspired by the tenets of structuralism and applying them to an organisational setting, the process of how meaning is inherent in figures of speech, both in the strict linguistic sense, but also as organisational

tropes, as they manifest themselves in buildings, texts and other artifact(s), which are open to interpretation by human agents and therefore changeable and unstable.

The contributory value of this chapter is severalfold: A gap in the current organisation theory and analysis has been identified. The lack of studies dealing with metonymical processes in organisation was made explicit. I conducted an analysis based on both metaphorical and metonymical applications. Secondly, most studies on organisational symbolism deal with symbols themselves, how they determine organisational sense-making processes, but do not address the question of how organisational symbolism emerged, how a physical object comes to symbolise something else. Again, I have addressed this issue in this chapter. Thirdly, although artifact(s) including architecture and furniture system are discussed in the literature, their existence is generally taken for granted. By making them part of a structuralist analysis, the actual process by which they come to be meaningful can be made explicit.

So, the analytical potency of the structuralist approach to language, artifact(s) and organisational settings is huge, it has nevertheless limitations (see my critique of Bouissac 1976 and Fiol 1989): In its pure form, structuralism eliminates material origins, concentrates on abstractions, rationalism, formalises the human actor as a language speaker and subsequently eradicates individuals or social functions. Finally, it denies history and is unable to account for change. These criticisms are partly elevated in the development of linguistic structuralism by Jakobson (1956) and Lakoff and Johnson



(1980), in so far as they theorise shifts (i.e. potential changes) in meaning via metonymy and metaphor.

However, the main criticism of structuralism is that it eradicates human agency and thereby social context from language use. Questions such as "why should the concept of game as a purposeless activity be suppressed by another concept of game as a competitive activity", "are there any consequences, if so what are they, for individuals that continually 'resist' the dominant concepts", e.g. by ironising them or developing their own conceptual images, "what is the relationship between language use and organisational practices", "which factors influence language use in practice" remain unanswered by a pure structuralist approach.

Giddens's critique of Saussure's "Geneva-to-Paris" train analogy shall conclude this chapter. "The identity of the Geneva-to-Paris train cannot be specified independently of the context in which the phrase is used: and this context is not the system of differences themselves, such as Saussure mentions, but factors relative to their use in practice. Saussure implicitly assumes the practical standpoint of the traveller, or the time-tabling official, in giving the identity of the train, hence the same "train" may consist of quite distinct engines and carriages on two separate occasions. But these do not count as instances of the "same" train for a railway repair engineer, or a train spotter." (Giddens 1982:6 in Linstead and Grafton-Small 1990).

The following chapters will address the issues raised in this critique by going beyond an analysis inspired by structuralist ideas and by asking “What does language do?”, “What do metaphors and metonymies do?”



## **Chapter 5 Talking and Acting: Matching Words to World and World to Words**

Following on and informed by the ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), Jakobson (1956), Lodge (1977), Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphorical and metonymical structures in organisational talk were investigated. Together, these structures form the conceptual bedrock within which the organisational members take cognizance of the world they inhabit. The application of the organising framework to the collected data showed how tropes inform talk, texts and artifact(s). The status and agency of the individual member remained unexplored as did her social relationships and organisational context. Questions such as "who" is saying "what" in "which" context to "whom" were not addressed. This resulted in a critique of the structuralist approach as eradicating human agency and social context from its analysis. Chapter five constitutes an attempt to address the questions left open at the end of chapter four and endeavours to provide an answer to them by applying speech act theory and pragmatics to the data. Examples are used to illustrate the way talk and conventions develop. The instances and examples are taken from all data, i.e. meetings, fieldnotes, interviews. Some of these instances already have been used in chapter four. They are drawn on in order to demonstrate how an analysis focusing on language as action can supplement an analysis that has been informed by structuralist ideas.

Also new instances are incorporated into this chapter in order to expand the database upon which the theoretical consideration are taking place. The auto-ethnographic situation is used to provide the narrative background (Czarniawska 1997) against which the organisational talk is interpreted. As such my own, the authorial voice, is an explicit part of the process of writing this chapter.

### **5.1. Speech Acting in a Context-of-Use**

The very basic assumption about language as being conducted by people when engaging in parole and as performative (triggering of events) signals a departure from the assumptions of structuralism. Austin (1962) laid the foundations of speech act theory (Blum-Kulka 1997). He distinguishes between locutionary acts (the production of sounds and words with meaning; what the speaker says; illocutionary acts, the performing of a communicative function; what the speaker does ; perlocutionary acts, which specify the effects on the hearer(s) by uttering an expression in given circumstances.)



Although it is disputed how many different speech acts exist (Verschueren 1979, Mey 1993), Searle's (1969, 1979) classification of speech acts into five different categories still provides a solid ordering tool for analysis (for summary and critique of Searle's taxonomy see Bach and Harnish 1979 and 1991, Rosaldo 1990, Wierzbicka 1995, Schiffrin 1994, Blum-Kulka 1997, Mey 1993, Stubbs 1983). He distinguishes between representatives (e.g. asserting, concluding, claiming). They commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition expressed and represent a state of affairs, which has a words-to-world fit. The intention is to make the words fit the world. Beliefs are expressed, propositions occur. Directives (e.g. requesting, ordering, challenging, daring, asking). They direct the hearer towards doing something and have a world-to-word direction. Commissives (promising, vowing, pledging allegiance). The speaker commits herself to doing something with a world-to-words fit. Expressives (e.g. thanking, apologising, congratulating). They include acts used to express the psychological state of the speaker. Declarations (e.g. appointing, promoting, firing). They often affect change in some, often institutionalised state of affairs and express a bi-directional fit from world-to-words and words-to-world.

Also, the multiplicity of factors (such as the temporal and spatial setting, familiarity with the context, cultural assumptions and expectations) that determine the context of language use (Leech 1983, Levinson 1983) is integrated into the analysis, too. Instances of organisational talk are analysed in order to show how talk is action in the organisational setting. Following on from these instances, it is investigated whether talk



and action always form a dialectical whole. Finally, issues around fitting the world-to-words and vice versa via speech acting are linked to the metaphor of voice, institutional acts and the declarative force of utterances. The tropes metaphor and metonymy provide the trajectory for large parts of the analysis in so far as they are sounded for their performative potency.

## **5.2. Instances of Organisational Speech Acting**

The following instances of organisational talk will be used in order to introduce the relevant terminology as well as to demonstrate the ubiquitous occurrences of speech act performance. These utterances will be contextualised in their immediate organisational setting; information about the roles of the speakers and the contextual circumstances shall be given if relevant and if known. This, of course, implies drawing on the ethnographic research situation and means activating insider knowledge. However, I need to point out that any claims of authorial omniscience are refuted in so far as my knowledge about speakers and situational contexts is not complete and often I found myself wondering how to conceptualise and interpret what was going on. The names of the speakers have been changed to preserve their anonymity, in particular if controversial statements have been made. The data in which identities are disguised is taken from the pool of observations that I made in a more hidden role as researcher (such as recording talk in photocopy rooms, over lunch breaks etc.). When working with data from interviews or observed meetings no such attempt at disguising has been made, since my role as researcher was explicit to all speakers.

Instance 1: (date not exactly recorded, approximately February 1997, location: secretarial office, Totley, Old Hall);

*Natasha (secretary): em, no the meeting schedule you've got is fine.*

*Susanne (myself) : good - em//*

*Gill comes into office*

*Gill (colleague/my supervisor) : Have you seen Martin?*

*Natasha: He's about.*

Several locutionary acts are conducted in this example which result in a meaningful exchange of conversation. At this occasion I was checking with the secretary the schedule of meetings I meant to observe. Due to the "crisis situation" of the school, meetings were cancelled, rearranged, set up at short noticed, so that my observation schedule had become out of tune. Gill, my supervisor, came into the office, interrupting the exchange with a question/illocutionary act: she does interrupt the conversation. The perlocutionary act is the "answer" given by Natasha. In Searle's classification (1979) asking a question is a directive act, the point of which is to direct the hearer towards doing something (here: providing information). Following the rules of logic, the question *Have you seen Martin?* could have been answered by a simple "yes" or "no". However, the conversational implicature principle states that in a conversational setting, an utterance is always understood in accordance with what can be expected. In this particular conversational setting, the answer *he's about* makes perfect sense. It cannot be captured in a simple



syntactical or semantic rule, but can be accounted for by “some conversational principle.” (Bilmes 1986: 27). Natasha, successfully, interpreted Gill's question. In this example interpretation is straightforward, in more complex situations, “interpreting an utterance is ultimately a matter of guesswork, or [to use a more dignified term] hypothesis formation” (in Mey 1983:30 - 31), or misinterpretation abound. Gill now knew that firstly, Martin was on the premises, secondly, he had been seen recently and thirdly, that that he was not to be expected to fulfil more sedentary duties in his office: *He's about*. Natasha correctly guessed the context of the question (the persons involved, Gill and Martin, their background as lecturers, the ad-hocness of the situation). The more is known about the context, the more well-grounded the “guesswork” is going to be. Natasha followed the principle of co-operation (as originally defined by Grice, 1975), by which speakers are supposed always to provide the suitable amount of information. In this spirit, it will be avoided to either provide an overload or an underload of information.

Gill interrupted an ongoing exchange (not knowing that the matter had been concluded satisfactorily) with the declarative act, prompting Natasha into a representative act.

According to principles of the course of conversation, it was not her turn (Sacks 1971) to speak. However, introducing the concept of context and presupposing, her action can be explained. Gill and myself had arranged for a meeting to take place at 2pm. Before the meeting, we had met by coincidence at the coffee machine, conducted the social preliminaries (greetings etc.). Gill informed me that she needed to briefly get hold of Martin before the meeting. I decided to use the remaining time to check the operational arrangements for my thesis with Natasha. When Gill came into the office, her

presuppositions were that we (Gill and myself) had met already, the necessary information exchanged and she was likely to have seen Natasha, Martin's secretary, already (my presupposition) during the morning. Thus, her behaviour was less "rude" than an uninformed observer might assume. Conversations take place in a context-of-use. This context, even in a simple exchange is not a static concept. It is dynamic, including the "prehistory" of a particular utterance and even the prehistory of the people who utter the sentences. Thus, Gill's speech act is to be understood in the context of our past encounter at the coffee machine, her past endeavour to find Martin, the current context of Natasha and myself talking (though Gill could rightly infer that our exchange was characterised by a certain ad-hocness) and the future context of our impending meeting. Additionally, the physical settings (coffee machine, secretarial office, Gill's office), the understanding of people involved form the total event within which the exchange of speech acts take place - and make sense. Finally, it shall be pointed out that no direct speech act verbs (I ask you, where is Martin, I tell you he is about) were used in this exchange, which relied strongly on presupposing, implying and took the context into account. 'Context' also includes the assumptions that language users make. As Garfinkel (1967) has shown, making all assumptions and expectations explicit, is virtually impossible.

Instance 2 (Fieldnotes), Research meeting of International Business and Languages Group on City Campus). Attending: Research Leader for the IB & L group, a linguist colleague and myself, 16. February 1996)



Research Leader: *EVERYONE needs to realise that promotion is only to be had, if you are research active and that means having output to show. The way things are going, it might not be even a question of having a career, but to keep your job.*

In chapter four these utterance have been conceptualised as an instance of metonymic shift, in which meaning is transferred by causal contiguity from research active and having output to show to promotion/keeping one's job. It is the speaker who creates the causal contiguities. The speaker, a fairly recently appointed Principal Lecturer whose brief it was to improve the poor research record of this particular subject group, uttered these words to a small audience, totalling two. This utterance was made at the beginning of a rather brief meeting. As a whole it can be interpreted as an expressive act, in which the evoked entity EVERYONE is put into contrast with the actual number of attendees. In its distinct parts, including the metonymical shift between signs, the future that is predicted is one that in all its consequences is yet to be realised by the majority of the subject group. This utterances is not a mere statement (representative) of the current state of affairs, it is a directive in so far as the hearers are directed towards doing something in future (become research active) or else suffer the consequences. The dilemma of the speaker is of course that she has not got a relevant audience. When I discussed this incident of the poorly attended meeting later with a colleague and friend from the same subject group, her comment was (fieldnote, 28 February 1996, friend's office over lunch: *Well, [name] might think she can bully people into research. Not me. Not as long as I am co-ordinating placements, Erasmus and RVL teaching. They can all get stuffed.* In this interpretation, the

perlocutionary force of the speech acts is seen as an attempt to be "bullied into research", which is thwarted by the downright refusal (interestingly, in this act "she" becomes "they". The metaphorical substitution of the third person singular pronoun with the plural pronoun "they" will be theorised later on as the evocation of a collective voice). The metonymical shift that is made by the Research Leader in the context of the meeting is not echoed in the conversation I had with my friend: causal contiguities are open to interpretation and the conceptualisation of current and future realities depends on perspective. However, other data suggests that the illocutionary force, ie the ability to link talk and action, of the metonymic shift (from research active to having output to show for it) has had perlocutionary effects. In two interviews with two experienced colleagues, they stated that they had adjusted their behaviour in line with the causalities implied by the research leaders. *I do more research now. That's one of the ways how I have adjusted. I, em I, I am definitely writing more and I get more of it published. In the past I would have done as much thinking and reading and writing about it, but I would have used it for students, but now I think, I want something out of it. I'll get it published. There is a change in that sense.* (Martha. 17 July 1996). *I used to spend a lot of time and effort developing things. Now, though this is a function of age as well, I ensure whenever I do anything, I get at least two things from it, a practical one and an output.* (Bill, 4. September 1996). Both lecturers have adjusted their behaviour along the lines of the metonymic shift towards having "more research output to show", although being research active is being distinguished from the instrumentalism of getting as many items as possible published.



Instance 3: The following excerpt has been discussed in chapter four and been conceptualised as the dynamic relationship of signs, that need to be in binary position in order to be meaningful in the overall system. The difficulty that arose for the members of the School's executive was the indecision of the sign *professor*, that could not be *linked down* to *Reader* or *Senior Academic Postholders*. I interpreted this episode as the school's continuing struggle to find a meaningful definition for a senior role. In the speech act and pragmatic tradition, the roles of the speakers shall be reinstated and the development of the conversation will be looked at. For reader friendliness the excerpt will be produced again. Not all of the conversational course will be discussed; only sections pertinent to a language-as-action analysis shall be highlighted. Needless to say this kind of organisational talk is much more complex than the previously discussed examples and I cannot claim to know from what kind of knowledge base the individual speakers are operating from. The excerpt is taken from notes I made during a meeting of the executive group of SBS on 26 March 1996. In attendance were the Director, the Head of Undergraduate Programmes and Staff Development, the Head of Research, the Head of Postgraduate Programmes, the Head of New Ventures, the School Manager. The latter was the only woman (other than myself) in the male assembly. The agenda of the meeting was to be "The New Budget and Devolution", which was to have a major impact on the financial situation and structure of the school as well as the whole university. As previously stated interesting aside, I noted that although the meeting was to be *Rosie's meeting* (school manager), it was nevertheless dominated by the men and occasional

attempts to shift it back to her agenda were ignored. Since roles and role behaviour play a part in speech act analysis, the roles have been re-inserted.

*HoNV: We need to set up two to four year programmes to get people into research. We have got to do that. Also, you have to have people drop off the plank.*

*Director: There will be at least one this year.*

*HoR: In research, you cannot do this as a short option. Send our people to the PRC - if there is no outcome, other people are pissed off if other people do not deliver. Research is dead easy to measure. In four years I want to see for a researcher: one book of original thought, twenty conference papers, ten articles.*

*Director: They are reviewed every two years.*

*HoR: Let's take the RAE. Five very active researchers left in the past twelve months. But active researchers do not leave if they think the culture is right.*

*Director: Where are the readers?*

*HoR: They come out of my budget, the research fellows don't.*

*Director: This raised another issue. What else is different about this place, compared to our competitors. Our professorate is a personal title, not a role. Therefore, we do not expect anything of our professors?*

*HoR: In the old unis...//*

*Director: //...just a personal title. We could take the view that we do have expectations, just in the same we have expectations of our readers.*

*HoNV: So do we have control? Do we have control whoever gets it?*

*Director: If you are a professor without a role, you are just like any other member of staff, e.g. like (names two names).*

*HoNV: We have expectations of Principal Lecturers, Senior Lecturers.*



HoR: *In the old universities they are the top senior job. The problem is that we have SAPs and professors. How do they go together? The role of the professor is absolutely prime. You have SAPs, who are not profs, but profs who are not SAPs? You've even got subject groups with our a professorship in them.*

Director: *(name) as example. He is that type of professor, not a SAP, but also he has got no professor role. He does almost 500 hours teaching. I said to his subject leader to get it under 400.*

HoR: *He should be under 300.*

Director: *What do professors do?*

HoR: *THINK!*

HoNV: *Hugo does not have this role. He is not a researcher. His role is not as a professor. He is networking (to HoR): you are putting forward a traditional notion of professor.*

HoUG/S: *There are criteria for what a reader does. The reader is a role.*

HoR: *No, it's a job.*

HoUG/S: *We have a document that says this is what you need to deliver.*

HoR: *Well, it is never like that.*

HoUG/S: *Well.*

HoPG: *Here, professor is a status, not a role.*

HoNV: *Ten minutes ago, I said that.*

Director: *Is this the bloody limit of our expectations?*

HoUG/S: *We need to link it down to what a reader does. We need to link it.*

Director: *No, not necessarily. We need to move the school forward. In Richard's terms we are thinking for next year about mentoring.*

HoNV/S: *But we have not control over the people who have aspirations to this?*

?: *There is a panel.*

HoPG: *This piece has been brought in very cunningly.*

Director: *No, we are talking about resourcing and top slicing.*

HoNV: *I really do think, if we are top slicing within the school...*

Director: *Well, I can reformulate. We have two SAPs without proper roles. How do we resource them?*

HoNV: *Mentoring needs to be top-slicing role. Networking not.*

Director: *What comes out of HoNV's budget/ I can get a premium price - sounds awful - for (Name), but...*

HoUG/S: *I do not know what networking is.*

The topic is research and how to link research to the roles of staff engaging in it is discussed controversially. The speakers' various presuppositions about what research is and who should practice it, do not share sufficient common ground to lead to an emergence of an accepted definition for the sign "professor". Even though this episode is wound up when the Director reformulates the question (what is a professor expected to do?) and asks *We have got two SAPs without proper roles. How do we resource them?*, thus leading the conversation back into questions of resource allocation and budgeting (which are conducted via conceptualising budgets metaphorically as containers, into which people are put or come out of). While the discussion shares the common ground of conversational implicature (e.g. the question *where are the readers?* raised by the Director is correctly understood by the HoR as a question relating to how they are financed: *They come out of my budget, the research fellows don't*), which is encaptured in container metaphors. However, the discussion does not share underlying assumptions (Schein 1983, 1985) about the basic definition of the sign "professor". The cultural tradition within



which the HoR positions himself derives from an old university ethos, in which professors are intellectual workers. The cultural base of the HoNV is rooted in a different tradition, endeavouring to exercise control (*Do we have control whoever gets it? But we have not control over the people who have aspirations to this?*), i.e. to manage both people and process. The Director's concern is about the future: *We could take the view that we do have expectations, Is this the bloody limit of our expectations. We need to move the school forward. In Richard's terms we are thinking for next year about mentoring.* The direction of these utterances is geared towards the future, making the world fit the words.

The difficulty with the excerpt is the prevailing opaqueness of whether signs/words are representatives (representing a state of affairs), expressives (expressing a desired state of affairs - either linked to the past or the future) or directives, expressing the future state of affairs and matching the world to the words. Thus, although on the surface the discussion resumes its official agenda, the deeper, underlying differences/assumptions, remain unresolved.

The excerpt was recorded in March 1996, revisited in January 1997 when writing chapter four by which time the composition of the executive had changed, in so far as the HoR had left his role which was taken over by the HoUG/S. The active responsibility for research lay with the Head of the Change Management Research Centre. By June 1997, the situation had changed further. The Director had taken early retirement and the HoUG/S had become the new Director, appointing (i.e. speech acting with direct

perlocutionary consequences) several new people (new Head of Undergraduate, adviser to Staffing, Head of Quality) to this decision making body.

Interpretation is guess work. However, with hindsight, looking at the deep differences in this group that remained unresolved and unacknowledged, the fact that the one person positioning himself emphatically in an "old university tradition" has left/been made to leave the forum of decision making, that the one person (HoNV) who more than others represents a fairly narrowly defined entrepreneurial/managerial ethos is still in power, sitting on newly formed steering groups, "makes sense" when analysing this talk, both in a structuralist and pragmatic fashion. Finally, the replacement of the old Director could be perceived as a consequence of leaving fundamental issues unresolved, never achieving his expectations (the "vision") for the future, which he expressed symbolically as *we need to move* (metaphor) *the school* (metonymy) *forward*. In terms of speech acting, it remains similarly opaque, whether the utterances are declaratives, expressives or representatives; certainly no "action" has been taken to clarify what the signification of the sign *professor* is within the meaning system of the school.

The above attempt at interpreting the data from an ethnographic perspective within a speech act/pragmatic framework is fraught with difficulties. The researcher's dilemma is to interpret events which are complex and ambiguous and many of the complexities involved in these changes are beyond my observational realm. "The textual organisation of the standard confessional tale may be of some help for fieldworkers who regard



participant-observation as a metaphor best reformulated in hermeneutic terms: a dialectic between experience *and* interpretation. " (Van Maanen 1988: 93). In this tale, experience and interpretation (based on observation-cum-theorising) form a dialectical whole within which data exploration is conducted.

### 5.3. Do Words Matter?

Following on from a structuralist tradition, language was theorised as a symbolic system of signs, whose signifier/signified relationship is mainly based on arbitrary conventions. Calling a "tree" a "tree" is a cultural convention. It might equally well have been called "bush" or "hedge" or "eert" or "eret" or any other combination of letters. It does not matter to the material object "tree" how it is labelled. Does naming matter? Do words matter?

When researching language (parole) in my school, I came across several comments about *mere words, paper tigers, a vain labelling exercise* (fieldnotes taken around the time of structural changes, i.e. March - May 1997), when referring to the changes in the structural and personal arrangements of the school. In one such example, during a SDR (Staff Development Review, approximately March 1996) a discussion around the nature and purpose of staff development took place. One colleague asked: *Well, does it matter if we call it appraisal?* Similarly, on one of the feedback comments a colleague suggested: *Be careful, the language here veers towards appraisal.* Other instances refer to the restructuring of the school/university as a *meaningless relabelling exercise* (fieldnotes between March and May 1997) or *this is only a different name to make us more marketable. Still using the same name with different bits in it* (colleague at open staff

meeting, 20 March 1997, Dyson House). These examples suggest that "naming" and "wording" is inconsequential, a vain exercise being of no consequence. I shall contend, and in the following section reason (for), that my colleagues distinguish between "mere" words/labels as locutionary acts without illocutionary force and perlocutionary consequences. Thus saying: *It doesn't matter. It's a labelling exercise, so that some people I could name keep their positions and some new ones will get a position. But nothing will change*, implies that renaming and naming the world is of no (organisational) consequence. In this case the labelling process is considered to be without any perlocutionary effects. Also, the speaker implicitly distinguishes between organisational and personal consequences, since retaining or obtaining a senior position will have consequences for the individual involved (in terms of income or status), but not for the collective organisation. It is the very differentiation between personal and organisational consequences that renders this piece of talk "organisational" as opposed to personal talk.

Furthermore, naming staff development either *appraisal* or *mentoring* (as suggested as an alternative way forward during the discussion of the SDR group) does matter, because appraisal is linked to certain practices which are different from those associated with mentoring and development schemes. The hostility of staff toward control-oriented appraisal scheme is anticipated by one of the school's executive members when jokingly calling *appraisal - the banned word* (25 April 1996), but in private conversation referring to it as *sensible*. *Good people have got nothing to fear* (private conversation, not recorded). A quote from a meeting of the Quality Committee of which I am a member,



reads like this: *And now this new building is quoted as the panacea. Our real problem is that the school has got no teeth. We all know that John Bloke is a poor teacher and lecturer. The problem is that John Bloke needs a work load. Taking all this on is going to be hairy and messy* (4 July 1997). Here the "mere" talk of new strategic opportunities and competitive advantages associated with the move into the new premises is confronted with the "real" problem of the school as having no teeth. The school (metonymy) is weak (metaphor: having no teeth), since it has not succeeded in establishing the managerial processes and protocols to deal with incompetence. Words remain "paper tigers", with no illocutionary force. In another example, I discussed the proceedings of a research meeting with a colleague, who commented on this to me later on in an interview (newcomer interview, 12 March 1997): *He actually thinks that the difference that he puts forward views that things ought to change, they will change. The trick is that when you talk about research a lot of good things are said without any real implications.* In this example, the missing link between talk and action is expressed and in doing so, the mere pretence of wording the world is being criticised. Thus, either good intention (*a lot of good things are said*) are no guarantee that *real implications*, i.e. changes in the organisational realities will follow. The missing link between the words and the world can either be a lack of (positional) power to achieve these *real implications* or the words may be simply part of political opportunism (*the trick is to say...*) and as such part of "image management". Issues around power and its consequences for wording the world and vice versa will be discussed in the next chapter.

It is the contention of speech act theory and pragmatics that language has not merely a representative function, representing an external world, but that it also "does": It is a creating force, affecting changes in the world. A simple example is the directive "close the door", upon which the hearer gets up and closes the door. The world's physical arrangement has been changed, a door has been closed. Language represents the world and it constitutes it through talk. Talk confirms the existence of the world, it constitutes it and it (can) change it. In the following section I will show in how far language matters, naming and labelling matter (Alvesson 1994, Bate 1990, Czarniawska-Joerges 1988, Watson 1995) and in how far words can fit the world, but also in how far the world can be made to fit the words.

#### **5.4. Fitting Words to World and World to Words**

The concept of fit was established by Searle (1979). It expresses the fact that our words both match the world we live in, and that they, albeit not always visibly, are able to change that world. The fit can have a words-to-world and a world-to-words direction. Any kind of report or description fits the words to the world, which is achieved by using representative speech acts. Whereas in the categories of directives and commissives, the direction of fit is from world-to-words: I make the world fit my chosen words (e.g. by given orders, decreeing something). In the case of expressives, no direction of fit can be claimed: "When I merely express my emotion, there need not be any strict correspondence between what I say and what the state of affairs is like". (Mey 1993: 132). If expressives are essentially subjective, they can say nothing about the external world. However, given



that they often take the form of structural metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) or even image metaphors, they do reveal insights about value system and cultural assumptions as I have argued in the previous chapter. Also, in the organisational literature (e.g. Fineman 1993) emotions are conceptualised as powerful variables in organisational life. As such I do not agree with the statement that expressives do not express anything about the external world. They do express subjective and cultural interpretation. In declarations, the fit can be bi-directional. “Declarations bring about some alterations in the status or condition of referred to object or objects solely by virtue of the fact that the declaration has been successfully performed.” (Searle 1979: 37). In the example "I have just resigned" is a descriptive statement with word to world fit, whereas ""you are hereby fired" the world is fitted to the speaker's words and an employment relationship is terminated. Sentences such as “I have just resigned” are - depending on the context - not only declarative acts, they may very well be expressive acts, too, expressing emotions of indignation, outrage, frustration, resignation, triumph or whatever.

In the next instance a variety of exchanges including a report issued on the public information folder on e-mail to all staff, an e-mail exchange regarding this report and some pre- and inter-meeting “banter” about the exchange will be examined. Since these exchanges form a crucial element of my argument, they shall be given in full, with the exception of the report itself, which will be summed up and relevant sections shall be quoted in detail. A draft version of the full report has been put into the appendix 2.

The report (23 May 1997), in developing conversations came to be summed up as *the paper* or *Tom's paper*, informs the members of staff about the decision to establish a Graduate School in Business and Management (called SBS) and a "new" school called School of Business and Management (SBM, comprising the undergraduate business provision of the "old" SBS and other schools of the university), which is configured as an opportunity to address *fundamental problems facing the new School of Business and Management* (Report). The external context (Dearing Review, increased competition, changes in teaching and learning) together with the internal context (failure to meet internal university quality standards, HEFCE quality assessment of only satisfactory, RAE rating of 3b etc.) are listed as the reason for a necessary restructuring of the new school (SBM), which following the imperative of preserving academics as *custodians of our external representation* (report) suggests subject divisions as the future organisational structure.

The public reply made by one member of staff was:

*from: Higgins, Godfrey  
to: Hill, Natasha; + SBS - Academics  
Cc: Smith E. Peter; Davies Tom J.  
Subject: RE: Academic Restructuring - Draft Paper  
Date: 30 May 1997 13.40*

*It's taken a bit of time to get round to my shared folders - but having now read yours of 23 May, I would like to reply - especially to the para about 'ineffective leadership and mgt; avoidance of mgt resp.; a confused matrix org structure; ineffective systems and support; low employee commitment.'*

*As one of the manager's involved in the 'ancient regime' is Peter saying 'I am responsible for all this and I am sorry'? If he is, thanks for the candour, but don't take it too hard as, in many ways, the points you criticise were/are valued by some, including me. If on the*



*other hand you are together saying 'This wasn't our stuff - this is down to Norman [former director - S.T.] then this would seem both ungracious and unhelpful. During the French revolution many felt relief when the next purge occurred and their name was not included. As time went on however, they recognised the implacable and destructive nature of the spreading tide of blame and blood. It would be a shame if the People's Deputies were to end up standing by knitting while more and more of the revolutionaries trundled to the guillotine. Putting it another way - I don't find that the para as written enhances my 'low employee commitment'.*

*I could say more but that will do for now. If you have, thanks for reading this.*

*Godfrey*

Tom's (public) reply:

*From: Davies, Tom J.*

*To: Higgins, Godfrey, Hill, Natasha; +SBS - Academics*

*Cc: Smith, E. Peter*

*Subject: RE: Academic Restructuring - Draft Paper*

*Date: 02 June 1997 11:44*

*I thought it was the aristocracy who 'trundled up to the guillotine'!*

*Anyway, I am still knitting!!!*

*Tom*

Following on from this, the paper and Godfrey's reply were taken up in an exchange between Tom, another colleague and myself at the coffee machine in Totley, Old Hall in the break of a course leader meeting. The first half of the meeting ended on remarks about accountability for student recruitment, which merged into a discussion of "whose fault is the mess we are in?"

(3 June 1997)

*Tom: I know we won't have any Nuremberg trials. But I don't care. I still hold Norman accountable for the lot. Sorry Susanne.*

*myself: Not everyone agrees. Have you read Godfrey's e-mail?*

*Tom: Ha! Anyway, Peter puts the paper out and I get the hate mail.*

*myself: Well, it was only one. Don't worry about it.*

*Tom: I'm not worried.*

In the 'banter' in the break, Tom is taking up Godfrey's theme of allocating blame and reasserts (representative act) his position of accountability for the past, metaphorically captured by the "Nuremberg trial". My question referring to Godfrey's e-mail is replied to with the comment, that Peter made that paper available for public discourse, whereas Tom *has to respond to it* (although it is unclear what or who is making Tom reply). My comment (*Well, it was only one*) is meant to be an act of reassuring, which is not taken up (*I am not worried*), but rather reaffirms Tom's position in a self-assertive way. The aside, *Sorry Susanne*, can be explained by my being German and the chosen metaphor (Nuremberg trial) as being taken from the world war 2 context and as such being potentially insulting to me by breaking the British "don't mention the war if a German is present" codex.

As theorised and demonstrated in chapter four a document such as a report or paper is a metonymic device, forwarded essentially by causal contiguity (The decision of the Academic Board, the external and internal threat, the respond to the threat is the restructuring), describing mainly logical relationships between concepts, entities and events. Thus, the written "slice of life" "deluges us with a plethora of data, which we seek to unite into one meaning (...), the metonymic text cannot eliminate all signs that it is



available for metaphorical interpretation.” (Lodge 1977: 111). Summing up the "message of the text" in my interpretation reads as "urgent need to change". How do I derive at this interpretation? Firstly, by taking my knowledge of the authorship of this text into account (the paper was written by Tom D. in his role as advisor in staffing matters to the Director, Peter Smith, though it could only be put out for public comment by Peter Smith, the Director). Tom's agenda is concerned with the need for radical changes, both in terms of structures and people in the face of crisis. However interpretations are subjective (Mey 1993) and in Godfrey's interpretation of the paper, the overall symbolic value (i.e. interpretation of the metonymic text into an overall metaphor) is that of "allocating blame".

In terms of what this paper does, it exemplifies both the representation of the world and it designs a new world. Given the earlier theorising with regard to subject groups as metonymical devices in chapter four, structures symbolise a principle by which the world is organised and ordered, hence it is legitimate to regard a paper about structures as a paper implying a new world (this can also be supported by quoting some of the very many recent references, to *the new regime*, *when D-Day comes*, *in the new world* - fieldnotes April, May, June 1997). In terms of speech acting, this paper is a representative act: an assertion about the school's state of affairs and as such carrying the values of "true" and "false". The words are being matched to the world so as to represent its "true" status quo. The problem, of course, is that the representation of facts and the world is linked to a subjective state of mind. The speaker asserts propositions as true or false based on his

beliefs. In the paper of 23 May 1997 the problem as identified by Tom are explained by *there are several inter-related reasons for these problems, but the most significant include: ineffective leadership and management; an avoidance of management responsibility; a confused matrix organisation structure; ineffective systems and support services; low employee commitment. No single solution can address all these issues but the reorganisation of the school and the reallocation of leadership roles are a crucial starting point.* It is asserted that this is true that the problems have been caused by negligence and avoidance of responsibility, therefore the new school needs to be reorganised with new people in leadership roles. This assertion is disputed by Godfrey's reply in which he evokes the metaphorical analogy of the French revolution of 1789, interpreting the overall gist of the paper as *the spreading tide of blame and blood* and refuting the ontological truth status of some of the problem sources mentioned by Tom: *as in many ways, the point you criticise were/are valued by some, including me.* The question of "who trundles up to the guillotine?", the aristocracy or the newly (self) appointed People's Deputies remains unresolved, both parties unrepentant: *I am still knitting!!!*

The paper "acts" in a second way, in which the fit of direction between words and world is reversed and the relationship between words and world becomes dialectical. The direction of fit is from words to world: the world is adapted to the uttered words. In this declarative act the future is "envisaged" as having a certain structure that will enable the new school to *respond to the strategic context facing higher education, and in particular the Dearing Inquiry when the creation of external standard agencies are envisaged that will focus on*



*subject areas for both teaching and research* (report). Though the shaping of the world is not communicated by a blunt directive (the school will...), but rather more gingerly toned down by verbal mood (*the school would be organised, the proposed new structure assumes; this would provide* etc.), it is nevertheless an act of creating a new world and its organising format. Indeed, some of the “declared” changes did follow the paper, e.g. new Heads of Divisions ( a newly created role substituting the subject leader role) were appointed on 20 June 1997 - some of these positions were filled with “new” people. The declarative speech act has a dual direction: World-to-words in creating a future structure for the school and word-to-world in describing the past and current status quo that necessitates the restructuring and reallocation of responsibilities.

At an earlier meeting, 3 March 1997, between subject leaders and Peter Smith, whose position was then as HoUG/S, general issues around the move to the new building, the structural set-up of the school and the university were discussed. At this time the official decision to restructure had been taken and various inter-university groups were in operation in order to provide reports on the current situation of the school(s) and to propose future directions for the school(s). In a similar vein as in instance 1, the future is conceptualised in a new structure:

*Peter: Well, the model says there will be a graduate school, a postgraduate school consisting of the programmes of SBS and FSL. It is a separate school accountable to all financial matters to Johnson. Then there will be separate schools, FSL undergraduate and SBS undergraduate and, em, CMS undergraduate, with whatever name. With three different directors. The principal is not against this model, let me say it this way.*



*Norman's paper made no doubt that research centres would be in the graduate school. From Humpart's paper this isn't clear. Henry favours very much the idea that research centres are in schools. What we talked about is the link between subject groups and research centres. Rivers pushes very much towards research centres as a third model, standing alone, reporting to Rivers directly.*

The intention of this spoken report is to brief the subject leaders about the discussions that are being held amongst different groups and persons. The declarative speech act *The model says there will be a graduate school* takes the form of the dialectical figure of metonymy and metaphor and opens the briefing session. If it were not for the future tense, the declarative act becomes almost a representative act, stating the simple truth that the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes will be split, the current school will merge. The certainty is that of an order. The issue of *where research will be* is more open, though not to be influenced by the subject leaders. Several names and papers are mentioned (*Norman's paper made no doubt, from Humpart's paper this isn't clear, Henry favours very much the idea, Rivers pushes much for a third model*), all pursuing different models, although the overall tenor is that *the principal [Humpart] is not against this model, let me say it this way*. This is avoiding the blunt directive (the principal has decreed that the new model will look like ..) or even the direct declarative, but it alludes to the preference of the most senior manager of the school, which expresses a declarative certainty about the future, that will take certain forms.

In a similar discussion, which focused around new structures and the new building, various alternatives about how to divide and allocate space were being discussed (School Executive Meeting, 13 March 1997).



*Richard Elliot (Head of Research Centre): The issue is purpose. What about privacy for writing. Areas for cohesion and building together. Our questions need to relate to the purpose. Currently, the current set-up is J3. You need a J = 4 environment, that's the basis for funding or you are dead. That has a direct knock-on on outlay and design.*

*Tom Davies (adviser to Head of Staffing): I agree. The best of two bad worlds was open plan. We grasped open plan in the vain hope that it might be better. Now other configurations have appeared.*

*Colin Turbin (project manager for move): We could use the space flexibly. Like clear our desks every evening completely and simply equip one or two large rooms with desks and computers.*

*Richard Elliot: We are not writing to J4.*

*Colin Turbin: I don't know what this means.*

*Richard Elliot: You've got nothing to add to this discussion if you don't know what it means. Everyone needs to write to J = 4. More vision should drive this. If not, if we do not achieve this, people will go home to write, then there's little point in moving at all.*

*Catherine McCallum (Head of Undergraduate Programmes): Coming back to this. We might not all be writing articles, but other things, like I had today three students crying in my office. People going home will create even bigger problems in the undergraduate arena.*

As in the previous instance, these utterances are exploring the future in some detail such as the allocation of office space, issues arising from different needs such as the silence and privacy needed to think and write, the communal area needed to share and debate and the privacy needed to deal with emotive issues. In terms of the requirements for the environment the words of the research professor and former Head of the Change Management Research Centre, stress several times the current J3 environment and the need to create a J4 environment, *we are not writing to J4*. In terms of speech activity, the future world needs to be *a J4 world*, although the speaker doubts whether the current



wording of the world will deliver the conditions needed for a J4 environment. This is metaphorically expressed as the act of "writing", i.e. speech acting in a written form. The future in this metaphor is being written (by words). The concern of the speaker is the lack of fit between the current writing/wording and the future requirements. The creation of a J4 environment becoming a necessity for survival (*or you are dead*). The speaker presupposed that his audience can read his text and its meaning, i.e. that everyone is informed about the abbreviations and rating scales of the recent Research Assessment Exercise as well as the rating received by the school (3b). The question asked by Colin Turbin is bluntly dismissed (enacting a situation of losing face for Colin. A fact, he articulated himself to me at a different occasion: *Did you notice that Elliot insulted me at the meeting when I deliberately asked what J4 means?*). According to Brown and Levinson (1978), the notion of face has two aspects: a positive one, by which a person's status as an autonomous free agent is affirmed, and a negative one, by which a person's immunity from outside interference and undue external pressure is stressed. In talking to me after the meeting Colin was re-establishing his face, interpreting the seeming ignorance into a deliberate and provocative device: *I deliberately asked.*).

The overall tone of the speech act as uttered by Richard Elliot is that of a "warning": the words of the executive and the school ("everybody") are not matching the requirements for the future as envisaged by the speaker. The utterance is more than a representative act (although the description of the current environment as J3 is), it is also referring to the future, declaring the need to *write to J4* (declarative act with future direction). This



instance demonstrates the complexities of speech acting. The future is metaphorically expressed (writing to J4), the implications that failure to *write to J4* will bring are also encaptured metaphorically: *that's the basis for funding or you are dead*. The (metonymical) environment is metaphorically expressed in a declarative speech act. A possible and implied failure to fit the future world to the words is again captured metaphorically (*or you are dead*). Additionally, the immediate conversational context of this instance, is the move and the layout of the new building. Building and physical locations have been theorised in chapter four as metonymical arrangements. Thus, a change in this arrangement is a change in the metonymical set-up of the school. The context of this instance can be defined as metonymical, within with the declarative acts expressed as metaphors, take place. The metaphor (*writing to J4*) is not understood, at least by one hearer. Metaphors are primarily ways of seeing (wording) and understanding the world. The non-sharing of the J-environment metaphor implies the different ways of conceptualising the reality of the school. The mental model of the research professor is different from that of the project manager. With regards to their truthfulness, neither can claim ontological prerogative (though, in this discussion the research professor does by assuming his superior status). One could argue that the default assumptions (related to the research discourse) he tacitly implies are not activated in the audience to the extent that a meaningful exchange of thoughts could happen. Of course, in Colin's interpretation after the meeting, he maintains that he is perfectly able to activate these default assumptions, but quite deliberately refused to do so.



The next instance is taken from an interview with a peer, a colleague with whom I have taught on the same modules. We are of similar seniority (Senior Lecturers) and have been employed for 5 to 6 years in a full-time and permanent position. For purposes of interpretation some excerpts are given at length. Claude was restless and "walking around" when I came into the office. When the tape recorder had been switched on, he continued to do so (peer interview, 26 February 1997).

*Claude: ... they are demanding more from us, em, there seems to be a fair degree of misunderstanding about what happens. That's why I have got the regulations open.*

*Myself: I noticed. Why are you reading this?*

*Claude: Basically, it is ... a note from a student who wants last semester's course work ..[walks about] who, about management strategy [reads regulations, then student's letter]: "I passed the exam - just, but have a course work mark of 48%. It was not quite high enough to get my mark up to an overall pass". It turns out the student hasn't passed the exam. The student only got 35% in the exam and it seems that the basic letter is a misreading of [reads regulations] "where students fail core or designated units, he or she will be referred in this unit and has the right to be reassessed at one occasion only". He has not achieved 40%, he failed the exam.*

*Myself: If he fails the exam, he fails the exam. Even getting 70% in the course work wouldn't matter.*

*Claude: Yes, he failed the exam. If he had a higher course work matter.//*

*Myself: //but that doesn't matter!*

*Claude: //..if he got another 10% in the course work//*

*Myself: //the board MIGHT have decided to compensate, but then it MIGHT NOT. It all depends. What does he want anyway?*

*Claude: He wants the course work remarked. But there's no point. He cannot have it remarked, because he NEEDS a higher mark. It is not the course work,*



*the problem lies with the exam. It's the kind of thinking behind it: I'll have them redo it and give me another 10%.*

*Myself: Yea, everything is negotiable.*

*Claude: It's, it's the balance of power seems to lie with, the lines of communication lie with the Centre and the student union and there is a great deal of emphasis between the two about students' rights and we are actually getting dictated on us ... this is the marking timetable, this is the time to turn it around ..., you can do this, you can't do that. We don't seem to be part of this discussion. They don't actually say, well, if you've got forty odd pieces of work to be assessed in three weeks. They don't take that into account. As during the exams when you might still be teaching on other courses. So you cannot create the space and, em, there are, there are, so very unreal expectations of us and I think, it's not, the issue seems to be NOT the mark a student gets, but the mark that WE give them. It is our responsibility if they fail it... things at times feel very much... which is why I have reported myself for upsetting a student today - to Peter, Abel and Rudolf. A student, she's a single mother, rang me about a deadline for an assignment and the problem she has at home with her work and I said "well, another one with an excuse" and she slammed the phone down. It was a completely innocent remark, which 99 per cent of the time you could say and it'll be OK. The real reason is that I've been misrepresented before. Three years ago when I had that libellous statement. I was accused of doing something I had not done, and if anybody had bothered to check, they would have found out that that wasn't the case. It's so easy to be misrepresented and it is not the first time. It can easily become the basis for an appeal or what. Instances of students not turning up for classes and sessions and then using under-tuition as the basis for an appeal. The fact that they knew where I would be at what times. It was made perfectly clear that they would be working independently, but that I would be there and I was. The students weren't there and one group of students failed and the grounds of their appeal was under-tuition. So, in that instance, I supposedly turned students away. They turned up and I said "go away". It never happened. But that is something that entered the folklore and it makes your life more difficult, because unfortunately this is the world in which we have to live. We have to look after our reputation.*

I have theorised organisational stories as being a "slice of life", i.e. a metonymical device which is interpreted metaphorically as to create symbolic meaning. The three stories as told by Claude concern themselves with the relationship with students in general and the



nature of students' demands, complaints, appeals. The symbolic value of the stories becomes clear towards the end of the section. They symbolise *the world in which we have to live*. In terms of speech act theory "complaints" are to be classified as representatives, asserting that they are "true" and that they truly represent the world. In the first story, the representative act is linked to a directive act: The student wants the course work paper to be remarked. The issue at contention is whether the previous facts are truthful or not. Within the unfolding plot of the story the complaint turns out to be untruthful. The student had not passed the exam, in fact, he failed, which concludes the directive act, which is denied. This is justified by referring to the institutional framework and its rules and regulations. However, in terms of the conversation the matter is not settled for Claude, who takes his underlying concern further, "behind" the episode which is linked to the kind of thinking attributed to the student's request: *Everything is negotiable*. This leads on to a description (representative act) of his mental conceptualisation of the university, the students and their mutual relationships. In this set-up lecturers are the passive and oppressed recipient of orders (directives) as formulated by an anonymous *Centre* (metonymical construct) and the student union. Lecturers are *dictated upon*. Within the logic of the metonymic story and its metaphorical images, it is advisable to be careful and adapt everyday behaviour to the *world we have to live in*. In anticipating yet another student complaint (as possibly could be made by the female student) he reports himself (representative act) to his line manager, the Associate Head of Undergraduate Programmes and the Director of the School. In speech acting (reporting) Claude is anticipating (declarative act) possible future consequences for himself. He is linking these



back to his experience of having been misrepresented before. The students' (mis) representation of the facts (strictly speaking a representative act), being truthful or not, have *entered the folklore*, on a mythical level the misrepresentation has become part of the organisation's accumulated knowledge and lore (Trice and Beyer 1985). As an avoidance strategy "self-reporting" is the perlocutionary consequence drawn by this lecturer.

Within three interlinked metonymical devices (stories) the speaker's reality is expressed via metaphorical constructs. Past, present and future are interlinked via speech acts, which take either a world-to-word or a words-to-world direction. However, there is also a dialectical dynamic in the way the stories are connected. The action directed to the future (e.g. self-reporting) is informed by the present and past (having been misrepresented). Actions such as checking the truth context of the student's letter with a senior person, consulting the official examination rule and regulations, self-reporting make sense in Claude's overall mental map of the world, within which the role of agency is usurped by an anonymous Centre and the students and their representative bodies. The dialectical process is as follows: Once the world has been worded, the available words shape the perception of the environment; upon this, perceptions, speech acts with illocutionary force and perlocutionary consequence are executed, which in turn reinforce the respective worldview. By using language in speech acting human beings are created in their identities and their relationships, but they also simultaneously create the world by "bespeaking" it. In certain cases, this dialectical process may take on self-fulfilling

qualities. Here, the hopelessness of the situation takes the literal form of the grammatical passive voice: lecturers are dictated on.

A similar critique of reality is expressed (representative) in a conversation I had with a peer in my office. Discussing a work-related matter, the unit specification for a submission document, we drifted into an exchange of our emotional and mental state (my office, Totley, 19 March 1997).

*Peer: I know I should plough myself a furrow and get on with it like John O'Meara. The non-sharing of knowledge in this place is awful. I tell you what this place is like: There are seeds on the floor, some spring up. They are taken away to a glasshouse where they bloom. Most die. Why not take the glass house to where the seeds are, to get a field of blossoms and plants? My subject leader told me, first you need to deliver, then you might get help - not everyone is a self-starter, some people need more help.*

*Myself: The majority does.*

The conversational context is one of confirming each other's point of (world) view and in doing so providing the support mechanism based on collegiality and friendship. The critique of reality is, as in Claude's utterances, based on a metaphor, in this incident taken from the botanical world. Organisational processes (taking the seeds to the glass house) are criticised as ineffective (to create a blooming field of plants). A reversal of the process (taking the glass house to the seeds) is instead suggested, though this reversed process is unlikely to happen as the introduction of the institutional voice of the subject leader suggests. Both, the peer and myself, self-confessed of non self-starter status, feel like seeds on the floor, who might die. As such this metaphorical utterance is an expressive,



but at the same time, it represents the world as seen by my peer and myself. The depth of hopelessness of the previous example is not echoed in this incident. Nevertheless, the metaphorical vehicle configure both of us as fairly passive seeds, while the organisational processes pass us by.

Other cases are more simple. Recent appointments, e.g. to the School's executive board, are declarative acts made by the newly appointed Director. They were announced via e-mail, thus creating reality by filling roles with new agents, or as in an e-mail of 6 June 1997, confirming existent agents in their roles in the new structure (*As Head of Quality and Undergraduate Programmes are current roles and there is a need for continuity from the old SBS to SBM, I have confirmed Ian Carpenter and Catherine McCallum, respectively, in these roles*). This wording of the world does not always remain unchallenged (directive act). At another occasion, where two people were appointed to the executive group without prior advertising of new roles or any consultation, I recorded the following comments: *That e-mail is just amazing. It's corrupt, that's how it starts.* (open lunch meeting, 27 February 1997). This particular organisational voice, one could argue, is "talking back" to the voice of the director and does not agree to the process of shaping the world. However, the rejection will have no consequences in how the world is being shaped. Although this utterance constitutes strong criticism, it has not force to impact on the process of creation and is in this respect a "powerless" voice. However, should such a voice succeed to gain momentum, "powerlessness" can be reverted.

The voices that have had "a say" so far, as well as those that have not, constitute and create the organisation. How can many voices of a diverse collective of people become "the one" voice or even just "a" voice of the organisation. In how far is it justifiable for me to use the metaphorical term "voice"?

Having established the performativeness of language, i.e. what language does, the following section will investigate how the organisation talks and in doing so acts through collective voices. In order to do this, firstly the institutional setting of organisational talk shall be made more explicit.

### **5.5. Institutional Acts**

The examples and instances are taken from organisational talk; mainly from face-to-face conversations or discussions taking place within the e-mail system. By choosing this approach, it is implicitly assumed that organisations are expressed via their voices and that they are constructed and come into existence by acts of communication and talk.

Therefore, it is assumed, organisations can be understood through talk (and other sign systems). How can individual organisational members say "SBS thinks this", "the school needs to move forward", "the university declares". Utterances such as these have been theorised as metonymical and metaphorical devices, which allow humans to conceptualise and express their reality. This does not explain, however, "how the organisation enters the field of discourse, and comes to be accorded a voice there." (Taylor and Cooren 1997: 406).



The performative as first laid out by Austin constitutes a starting point for the investigation of the above questions. It takes into account the occasion in which it occurs. The essential characteristics of a performative act are: “There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that produce to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances. - The particular person and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.” (1962:14) Only if these social and institutional conditions are felicitously met, will the utterance be successfully accomplished. In the case of the quoted appointments (declarative act), these could only be made by the Director, because the appropriateness of his role as Director of school and the setting. This means that in performing language more than grammatical conventions are at force: **Language has social and institutional wrapping**. Only if these conventional settings are felicitously met, will there be a performative follow-on in the sense that positions are filled, new roles are created. The same words as uttered by myself and put for public discourse on the school's electronic mail system would remain without organisational consequences (though they might result in a reprimand for me). In another example that I quoted concerning the issuing of the paper regarding the restructuring, the paper had to be *put out by Peter*, because only he holds the institutional base to link words to actions. The hearers or recipients of these texts are familiar with the institutional context in which such acts of speech occur and supply the missing situational background in interpreting the texts. “Rules are involved, but the rules of grammar are not the only ones to be taken into

account. Other conventions are also in play.” (Taylor and Cooren 1997: 411) Thus, speech acting is not linked exclusively to individual utterances, it is evoking the institutional and social. This social wrapping was made explicit by Austin in his early writings, but neglected in his further work. Searle, in 1979, reasserted the changing force of declarative acts. “All that was required for the ‘world’ to fit the ‘word’ was for the audience to recognise the state declared by the word, and it is the umpire [director - S.T.] who speaks the word. It is a power - the power to make the world be what it is by our declaring it to be so - that comes, Searle says, from a kind of human agreement. The difference between a 'linguistic declaration (...) and an extra-linguistic declaration (...) is (...) the kind of fact that is created by the result. To say "The meeting is adjourned" is to perform a linguistic action but the fact so created is not linguistic, since (assuming it is felicitously expressed) the meeting is in fact adjourned. But since language is *itself an* institutions, the difference is relative.” (Taylor and Cooren 1997: 421). Austin’s “conventional procedure” is developed further and linked to “a kind of human agreement”, which goes beyond ‘mere’ linguistic utterances. The paper had to be *put out* by the Director (Peter), because only he, according to this “human agreement” is in the position to perform a linguistic and associated performative actions. Although there are members of the organisation who do not accept the “human agreement”, they may voice their concern or resistance, but are unable to (immediately) prevent the wording of the world.



## 5.6. Organisational Voices and Declarative Force

When declaring *Catherine McCallum and Ian Carpenter* appointed as Head of Undergraduate Programmes and Head of Quality, Peter Smith is clearly not acting as an individual actor, a real person with a name, a personal identity and history, but in order to perform the act of appointing felicitously he is an actant (Greimas 1987): as an abstraction that expresses the properties associated with the felicitous performance of the act of appointing. Peter is enacting his role as Director of the School. In carrying out (speaking) the action of appointing, i.e. in performing his role, he acts as an agent on behalf of the School (or the University), which is the principal. Peter's words, the declarative act, have the force to link words to world, because he is the actant (role carrier), who is an acting agent (carrying out the role) on behalf of the principal (the school). Peter, in speaking the appointing words is both enacting the organisation as well as speaking as the organisation: He is the school's voice. The school is, of course, not an actor in the literal and individual sense, the school is a collective entity. It has a voice only through its agent(s). Of course, there are many voices to a collectivity, but they become one institutional voice through the agent. In a dialectical relationship it is through the agent's voice that the organisation comes into existence and the organisation in turn gives authority and "truth" to the agent. Of course, the dialectical relationship between agent and organisation imply that the agent's preferences influence organisational decisions. It can be assumed that Peter as a person liked and respected Ian and Catherine for their professionalism.

The metaphor of voice appears in different forms in the organisational theory literature, being theorised as either the expression or suppression of the voices of organisational members. The taxonomy of voices as suggested in the literature (Putnam, Phillips and Chatman 1996) differentiates between distorted voices (e.g. Alvesson 1993, Deetz 1992), voices of domination (Fairclough 1992, Deetz and Mumby 1990), different voices (Marshall 1993, Calas and Smircich 1996) does (partly) overlap with the taxonomy that I induced from the data as new voices, having no voice, fading and fluctuating voices, dissenting voices. In my theorising, the question "who is the principal behind the voice/agency?" led me to consider issues around transcendence and the resolution of the "I" into the collective "we".

In terms of bi-directional fit of declarative acts, Peter as an actant is enacting his role by speaking as agent on behalf of the principal, the fit is world to words: It is the world (the organisational world) that comes to be by the uttering of the word (appointing). On the other hand, the utterance is only meaningful, because the organisation pre-existed the declarative act of appointing. The direction of fit is here word-to-world. This need not be a paradox: It is through speech acting that the organisation is constituted, but it is in speech acts that it is expressed.

So, even making a promise such as "I'll see you in your office at 2pm" is expressing and creating the organisation. Making a promise is enacting the organisation. "I'll see you at 2pm in your office" is assuming the pre-existence of the organisational world. Even in this



brief, as well as other simple examples, the fit is bi-directional, the organisation is both enacted and created.

#### **5.6.1. New Voices**

The second half of the data collection period fell in a time of radical change for the school and the university. New roles were created, old ones abolished, many existing roles filled with new people. Since I have witnessed the emergence of one such "new voice" from a close proximity (in terms of observing meetings, working under that person first as a subject group member, then as a course leader and from a general collegial relationship with that person), I will follow the process via which Tom Davies came to be a spokesperson, the voice, for a collective of staff. Tom was appointed by Peter Smith as a member of the executive in the capacity of advisor to the Head of Staffing (Peter Smith). From the appointment onwards Tom could claim to have become one of the official agents of the school, his words carrying the authority of office: describing the old world and envisaging the new as he did in the paper he wrote.

An open staff meeting (20 March 1997, Dyson House, Room 516) was called by Peter Smith to update and inform staff about the developments regarding the restructuring and the latest decisions taken by the Academic Board. This briefing meeting will be described in some detail. It was scheduled for 11am - 12noon, with Peter arriving a little late to start his presentation at the Overhead Projector. About thirty-five staff had assembled (which considering it was still teaching term is a high turn-out):

*Em, Tom was held up. He'll arrive a bit later. I will start you off with the facts and Tom will take over. I have to leave early. (...). Well, there are some absolute decisions that were made at the Academic Board yesterday. We are one step ahead on the ladder, but not much more. Interpretations are difficult within the Academic Board.*

After the formal presentation about the structures *what is going to be where*, the seriousness of the situation was made clear by Peter's announcement that the

*Governors came that close to take over the school. We took a lot of stick with regard to the AQR. We need to put mechanisms in place. Only two schools were named. I get an impression from talking to senior management, that the governors identified major problems with regard to SBS. They were going to put a group of governors to run SBS. We seem to have turned that round. We put forward a business plan (...) We have got more negative indicators than any other school. The student questionnaire survey says that only thirty percent of our students would recommend us to their friends. We need to do a unit by unit evaluation (...). I am at the moment firefighting. I don't want the governors in here. We've got to put ourselves right.*

This is an instance of the dialectics between organisational voice, where the pronoun "we" stands for the school, rather than for the assembled members of staff. The school was criticised, the school has too many negative indicators, the school needs to amend its ways. When using the first person singular (*I*), Peter is reporting his impressions and his convictions (*I don't want the governors in here*). Although there is a shift from the collective *we* to the singular *I*, Peter never abandons his agency to act on behalf of the principal. *I don't want the governors in here* is still an utterance made by the Director of the School. This becomes clearer by the final shift to the collective *we've got to put ourselves right*, which although integrating and evocative is nevertheless a directive act. The evocation of the collective by dint of using pronouns such as *we* affirms and creates



its existence, whose collective face is threatened by the other collective voice *they*. They being the university's senior management and/or the governors. In this incident the handling of the referential pronouns indicates the shifting dialectics between collective voice, agent and principal.

In the next excerpt, the demarcation between "I", i.e. the actor himself, and the collective "we" becomes blurred, it vacillates: A new voice is establishing itself. Peter left after about thirty minutes (*to firefight*) when the open discussion began. Tom had entered the room about fifteen minutes into Peter's presentation and sat quietly at the edge of the lecture area. He was listening intensely and seemed almost withdrawn in himself. Unlike his usual extrovert personality, he did not make eye-contact with his colleagues or comment on the talk by Peter. Tom took over Peter's role. As if to demonstrate status, the seminar/lecture room is designed in a way that elevates the speaker by having a stage-like platform, in the Centre of which is a small rostrum with a lectern, which Tom used initially, to abandon it later on when he used the platform to walk up and down while talking. The initial reaction by staff to the previous announcements was shock (this might very well have been intended), comments such as *This comes completely out of the blue. I am really shocked; Is this the Gillian Shephard's Riding School?; I had no idea that our reputation was that bad*) were made. Most other questions concerned themselves with the new building and the meaning and implication for staff. Tom summed the comments up:

*What does it all mean? No one knows. That type of discussion should have started earlier on, but it didn't. We've got into a mess, but it's an opportunity. I am like everyone else, I would like a big office, big desk. I came down here to Dyson. I walk along the corridor*

*and never see anyone, unless they pop their heads out of their offices. There's no community. We never see each other.*

Similar to Peter's earlier comments this quote contains a shift from *we* to *I* and back to *we*.

By using the collective *we* Tom is acting as an agent describing the school's self-inflicted situation. He then shifts to the first person singular. He acted like an individual actor, when he came *down to Dyson*. At the same time he ensures that he still speaks for the collective, in particular the collective at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy ("down to Dyson" is a metaphor expressing cultural values), which he represents: *I am like everybody else*. The continued use of the first person singular at the beginning of each sentence is a sound figure, an anapher, rhythmically asserting the "I's" actions to finally resolve the tension between *I* and *we* in the last sentence, when the *I* collapses into the collective *we*. The resolution of tension from *I* to *we* is echoed in the resolution of tension between Totley and Dyson, the act of having moved down is a physical as well as an extremely powerful symbolic act, when one takes into account the superior position of Totley in the school's metonymical arrangements. Tom did not exactly answer the question, which was *what will be the timing of the actual move?*, but he created himself as the legitimate voice of people, in addition to already having been made one of the official institutional voices by dint of being appointed to the executive.

When working with this particular excerpt of data, I had a very vivid memory of Tom standing elevated on the rostrum and emerging, agitatedly, intensely and convincingly as a new voice. In this regard I had witnessed a historic moment in the school's annals: the



emergence of a new voice and one of its first venturing into the open discourse of the school. By writing the events of this meeting down and reflecting on them they became what Denzin (1987, 1989) calls a re-lived epiphany, the meaning of which derives from the experience of having relived the situation. As such, the witnessing and subsequent writing of events creates meaning and bestows permanence.

I am not alone in these observations. In March, May and June 1997 several other instances confirm Tom in this role. *Tom expresses an urgency I have not heard before* (fieldnotes, 20 April 1997), *Dare we start? Tom isn't here yet* (executive meeting, 8 May 1997), *If Tom were here he would say this is due to a lack of leadership from top to bottom* (executive meeting, 4 March 1997), *Susanne, you need to make a choice whether you want to follow the Catherines and Toms* (fieldnotes, 2 July 1997, advice given to me by a peer). Tom's presence, his voice, is being evoked, not in a personal capacity, but as an agent speaking for the collective. In the example, *Susanne, you need to decide ...*, a peer and friend gave me advice as to whether to apply for one of the new managerial positions (as Head of Division) in the school or not and if, in doing so, following the *Toms and Catherines*. Both personal names are used in the plural, indicating that my friend was not talking about individuals, but about who Tom and Catherine stand for, viz., a certain generation of staff claiming its place and voice in the organisational hierarchy (which, of course, is a metonymical contiguity).

On recollecting the open meeting of 20 March 1997 in its entirety, it took on a certain stage-managed, theatrical quality. The metonymical arrangement of the room metaphorically evokes the theatre stage; the behaviour of the "actors" as the harbinger of bad/important news, the exit to face the external threat (*to firefight*), on which clue the second actor, who had been waiting behind the curtain enters the stage to epitomise the resolution of friction and promises betterment. The audience, duly, is moved.

Erving Goffman has constructed a sociology to examine and analyse how individuals present themselves to others (1959, 1963). The open meeting is, of course, such an example of self-presentation in a public setting, which can be analysed by utilising the dramaturgical metaphor to point out the constructed nature of social interaction.

Similarly, in the organisation theory literature it is in particular Heather Höpfl (Höpfl and Linstead 1993, Höpfl 1995, Höpfl and Maddrell 1996) who draws on the dramaturgical perspective to shed light on organisational processes. Tom's and Peter's skills as actors enable them to communicate appropriate emotions (aversion/fear) to the audience: "that is the extent to which the audience is moved or transported." (Höpfl and Linstead 1993:76).

The passion of fear is aroused by both Peter and Tom. An element of mystification is added, since it remains unclear how the Academic Board works, what interpretations mean within the Academic Board. Who, in the end, is the author of the script? Tom points out - almost as an opening line: *What does it all mean? No one knows.*



Concomitant with informing staff about the new structure, emotions are being appropriated: “Metaphors perform as the primary device of this transformation and function to carry the notion of transcendence of the commonplace.” (Höpfl and Maddrell 1996:206). As my analysis has shown the vacillating fluctuation between "we", "I" (and "they") transcends the individual voice into the collective chorus "we". Note, also, that Tom's affirmation *I am like everybody else* purports the theory of transfiguring the commonplace into a state of transcendence. Evangelical overtones informed this meeting. The tide of criticism and threat was only to be stopped if individual actors agree on a common consensus. As Höpfl (1995:1) points out (referring to external relationships such as organisation and its customers) : “The notion of a corporate identity is, of course, a construction, an assembly, an aspirational bricolage which is without flesh and blood. In this sense, the constructed identity of the organisation is a metaphysical entity which arises from a transformational movement from the individual to the collective "we" to the reified (perhaps deified) "it". ("It" being the corporation.) In the context of this thesis, the "it" is in a state of inchoate flux and many of the events can be constructed as attempts at "it-definition".

In a similar vein, Tom was subsequently appointed as Acting Head of Specialist Postgraduate Programmes, was chairing an emergency meeting of course leaders (5 June 1997. Totley, Old Hall). On the issue of recruitment ... *I have never tried to distance myself. I remained involved in the nitty-gritty of course management. We'll get our revered senior colleagues and drag them to the companies. They just cannot lay all the blame on us. They are as accountable as we are.* As in the example taken from the open staff

meeting, the alternate use of first person and plural pronouns, indicate the shift from individual actor, *I*, who remained involved in the nitty-gritty operations of operational course management, to the agency of the collective *we* to the distanced *they*, the senior colleagues, who *will be dragged to companies* to jointly recruit with the collective force. Tom is the actant (Acting HoPG, spec.) which he enacts by evoking the collective *we* (the common course leaders), which he contrasts with the *revered senior colleagues*. By establishing his commitment to *remain involved*, being *like everybody else*, Tom claims a higher authority than mere office can attribute, to be a leader of the people. However, within the context of the organisation, being an informal leader would not suffice to render his words powerful swords to link utterances and action, world to words and vice versa. This can only be achieved by being a carrier of the institutional agency on behalf of the principal.

A friend mentioned to me that she *found it all a bit exaggerated. Like we are lost souls or what*. (2 June 1997). The messianic metaphor (lost souls being saved by the ascendant from heaven), stretches further than just this comment. The fact that Tom was "elated" via the physical arrangements of the lecture theatre, the talk of *coming down* (to Dyson [earth] from heaven [Totley]). The instance of using a rhetorical device, the anapher, invoke a preaching situation, and the claimed moral authority (*I have never distanced myself*) position Tom as the voice of the collective, which is almost a religious voice: vox populi, vox dei: "... any particular actor, individual or collective, inspires respect to the extent that he, she or it is perceived by people to be endowed with such moral authority



that they come to be informed by a psychic energy that makes us bend to their will, whether or not we believe it to be wise to do so” (Durkheim 1960 [1912] in Taylor and Cooren 1997: 25).

The analogy between Totley as Heaven and Dyson as Hell was not arbitrarily made by me. In an “Investor in People” report which sought staff’s impressions about their experience at work the heaven/hell comparison was drawn by a majority of staff.

Likening Dyson to a lower status, worse mode of being, fits the context of this meeting with its messianic undertones.

Implicit in espousing the dramaturgical perspective is the question “what is sincere?” and “what is performance?” and “how can one tell the difference?” In Goffman’s terms (1956) “sincerity” and “cynicism” are the ends of a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Since the two elements of the continuum are often inextricably interlinked, it is difficult to separate sincere from cynical elements. “Cynical” in the discussed instance would be the deliberate manipulation of the audience in order to produce consensus for personal gain, “sincere” would be the symbolically significant act to change the physical location and to move from Totley to Dyson. Although, in a cynical interpretation one could argue that given the impending relocation of the school to the city centre, the move was inevitable and had more to do with “being in line with a relocation of power”. In the end endeavours to neatly distinguish between “sincerity” and “cynicism” are vain. The actors and their acting remains intriguingly ambiguous.

### 5.6.2. Having No Voice

As new voices emerge and constitute themselves as agents on behalf of a principal construct, there are others that are not "being heard". In the literature, having no voice is often attributed to women in a male world, or minority groups e.g. ethnic (Van Dijk, Ting-Toomey, Smitherman 1997, Jaeger and Link 1993) or sexual (Bradshaw 1996, Lazar and Kramarae 1997, Tannen 1990, Thorne, Kramarae and Henley 1991). I will contend that there are other organisational actors who do not find the literal and metaphorical platform to be heard. The example I shall use to demonstrate this is, ironically, the "Case of Languages". "Languages" is to be understood as a metonymical device comprising the academic subject, the academic discipline and the language staff itself, i.e. the linguists, which comprise of two groups: The IB linguists = International Business linguists and Language Centre Staff. "Languages", so it is argued, have never figured prominently on the organisational mind. My own socialisation into the university and the school took place in the then newly created "International Business and Languages subject group" (IBL) in 1991/1992. Before the formation of this group, languages never had had a *natural home* (interview retired colleague 5 March 1997) in the Polytechnic:

*I would love to look back, to see people working successfully in a well-managed organisation. That would make me very happy. I've been here now twenty-three years and consistently languages had to struggle for their survival. Under Isaac who used to go around and say "I am actually a historian. Languages are not really a subject. It is not an academic discipline." He was the Head of Department. So you hardly need enemies. Then there were the degrees, BAIBL, BABS under people like Herbert Thompson. We were just trodden on. Peter and I tried, we had to struggle like mad, even to have languages in the programme at all. So I just feel unconvinced about the latest efforts, that languages will be all singing and dancing.*



Languages in this account *have been trodden on* and have not been taken seriously by senior members of staff. They were never actively involved in wording the world, but the passive and alienated recipient of orders from above. The IB linguists continued *to eke out an existence* (fieldnotes, 15 December 1995) as a part of the undergraduate business programmes, until the emergence of a "Language Centre" with the brief to provide generalist language provision across the university. This Centre started quite modestly in a single office in 1993/94, but grew quickly to occupy a purpose-built new building on the City Centre Campus. The International Business linguists were then named as the *so-called Dyson linguists* (e-mail, 14 February 1997). Interestingly and significantly the metonymical link between the "container", i.e. Dyson and the contained, i.e. the linguists has to be softened by using the attribute *so-called*, thus ironising this metonymy so as to indicate "no offence" to the *Dyson linguists*, which again points to Dyson House as being at the bottom end of the school's ordering and meaning system named after their location (metonymy), were left behind and the gulf between the Language Centre and the Dyson linguists grew. It is difficult to reconstruct this time, but professional jealousies (about the allocation of financial and support services, regrading and appointment issues) and personal likes and dislikes split the language group even more. The Language Centre found in its manager at least its voice, but remained nevertheless perceived to be concerned with *mere servicing, not any academic work* (executive meeting, 15 May 1997). On the background of the general crisis situation, the IBL subject group was finally split into an IB and a separate Languages group. "Merger talks" between the Dyson

linguists and the Language Centre began. The general concern was that to remain in a position of passivity would mean having the future shaped for languages:

*When the proposition was put to us that a separate Languages Subject Group would be formed, I felt very enthusiastic about the positive changes that this could potentially herald. It offered us the opportunity to shape the group and its activities and to have a say in the future. My greatest concern is that our future will be decided for us if we remain silent and are seen to be happy about remaining silent. (public linguist e-mail, 24 January 1997).*

The metonymical link between *remaining silent* and *having the future decided for us* and *to shape the group and its activities* and *to have a say in the future* can be summed up metaphorically as "having a - or no - voice". It is equated with having the power to actively shape (word) the world. Therefore, the fact that no unified principal "Languages" existed in the recent past meant that their agency could neither be activated nor executed. Comments such as *languages have no voice*, *Rivers told me that he never hears anything from languages on the school board*, *we need a unified structure to give a strong voice to fight our corner better* (fieldnotes, all taken in February/March 1997) express the urgency to enact agency by speaking and in doing so shaping the future.

The linguists' attempt to establish a stand-alone merged Language Centre was thwarted by the Academic Board and it is now integrated into SBS as a division.

Reconstructing the past is fraught with dangers. I have accounted for the Language group as having "no voice". The colouring of accounts and the past may change, which the



concluding instance taken from the Language Case will show. At a language meeting (26 February 1997, Language Centre) one member of the IB linguists, who had been one of the fiercest proponents of the “narrow-mindedness” of the Language Centre said: *Let us remind ourselves of this: The split was not in our thinking, but only physical and in budget barriers. It's all budgetary. It's all they care about. It's all budgets.* This unexpected reinterpretation of the past was summarised by the final comment of the subject leader, who had chaired the meeting: *I am amazed. I expected this meeting to be dreadful and now it is all sweetness and light.* The attribution of blame to the anonymous agency of "they" (though by metaphorical extension "they" can be read as the management as the principal behind "they"), remained unchallenged by the audience (other than the indirect comment by the chairman). In private after the meeting, this interpretation of the past was referred to as *utter bullshit* and *hysterically funny* and *self-denial mode*. It is possible, that this "self-denial" allows to keep "face", so that the joint future may be started from a face saving rather than a face losing position.

A group of people can remain "voiceless" as can individual actors. In one previous example, a peer interview of 26 February 1997, the future is something that will be determined by someone else: *I think choice is something I haven't got. I'll be told* - on positioning himself somewhere in the divisions (peer interview, 26 February 1997), which echoes his word about *things being dictated on us*. As with the case of languages, the individual actor does not find the necessary agency in order to be heard. Whatever may cause the failure to find agency, the results are devastating for self-esteem and self-respect.

Contrasting these two cases with the exuberant emerging voices of the organisation, the difference in confidence can be linked to their ability to be an active agent in "bespeaking the world" on behalf of a higher principal on the one hand or a passive bespoken recipient of the former's agency.

### 5.6.3. Fading and Fluctuating Voices

If, as shown, new voices emerge, in particular in times of change, others will disappear or lose their authority to bespeak the world, since the agent's authority to bespeak the world is fragile. "It may alter direction and fluctuate in intensity". (Durkheim 1912, in Taylor and Cooren 1997:26). The early retirement of the School's director is an example of losing one's voice. Evidently, this is linked to the abandonment of his role as the most senior representative of the school. However, even before this announcement, the authority to articulate the school's mind was queried. While I was discussing work related matters with the Head of Postgraduate Programmes, Tom D. entered the room.

*Tom: Jim, have you got a minute, after you have finished that is.*

*Susanne: We've done.*

*Tom: Now, Susanne, are you in our subject group by now?*

*Susanne: I don't know. I hope. I assume. Everything is changing, even the IB linguists and the Language Centre are talking of merging into one big subject group.*

*Tom: Well, whether there will be subject groups at all is still open.//*

*Jim: //but there is Norman's paper.//*

*Tom: //which might very well be exactly that: Norman's paper.*



Jim:                *In which case, how will the graduate school be staffed?*

Tom:               *Raises shoulders*

A paper about the future graduate school is to be seen as a declarative (written) act, which is wording the world. If this link between words and world cannot be forged, the act has no illocutionary force and perlocutionary consequences. The paper is not an act to shape the world, it is not to be metaphorically understood as an exercise of power; it is literal, not metaphorical, a paper. This reply is not disputed by the hearers (HoPG, myself) or queried (e.g. by "what do you mean by that?"), but passed over in silence. It is accepted by reflecting about the consequences for the graduate school. Similarly, the lack of force attributed to *Norman's paper* was articulated in a Subject leader meeting with the Head of UG (and future Director) (13 March 1997, Dyson House, Head's office), when discussing the different blueprints about the new organisational structure. *Norman's paper made no doubt that the research centres would be in the graduate school. From Humpart's paper this isn't clear.* Although these utterances might simply be interpreted as simultaneous explorations of ideas, the way they are contrasted with each other: *made no doubt* versus *isn't so clear*, that is to say contrasting a position of "no doubt" (Norman's paper) versus a position of "doubt" (Humpart's paper) is an antithetical device, explicating opponents rather than equal blueprints. During these weeks of vacillating, ascending and descending voices (February - April 1997), rumours and gossip abounded. Many instances of *Have you heard...*, guesswork and curiosity-driven exchanges were recorded, though it is difficult to reconstruct from these voices the "factual" chronicle of events. By announcing

his retirement to the senior executive and on the same day to the rest of the school, the Director officially renounced his voice.

In another organisational incident, a member of staff saw himself appointed to the Executive after the foundation of SBS then demoted from it, though retaining his position as a SAP and his associated role, to be reinstated as a member of the executive in the new regime. The person himself said, when asked by me how this all came about: *you know, these things happen, and yes, it is also a question of personal likes and dislikes, but also, they just happen. It seems to be a thing of the time, one doesn't fit in, one falls from grace, then it all changes. I felt it did not have a lot to do with me as such.* (Fieldnote, 13. March 1997). The process that is being described, is a fluctuation between a state of having a voice and having no voice. Although some of the process is attributed to personal and possible political reasons (*one doesn't fit in*), there is some "thing" more than that, one *falls from grace*. As in the previous discussion, a religious metaphor, that of the fallen angel, Lucifer, is being used to describe an organisational process. As with any other metaphor, a tension or incongruity (Kittay 1987) exists (the person is not literally Lucifer, the fallen angel), but it expresses a perspective on life and this perspective is informed by the spiritual - as are the instances of new and emerging voices.

#### **5.6.4. Dissenting Voices**

The agency of voice enables the organisational actors to transcend their individual status into a collective entity. Few voices succeed in the act of transcendence and sublimation of



the individual into the collective. Other voices continue to exist and do not necessarily concur with the agency of how the world is worded and how words are made to fit the world. An example has already been given in the discussion of the e-mail exchange between two organisational actors, debating over the representative act of explaining the past events. In another example, in chapter four, I have quoted the words of an experienced linguist, who had satirised the business language and leadership metaphor during an appointment event: *Everyone in the school is a leader [facetiously]. We have course leaders. Susanne over there is a course leader. Bert is a subject leader, and there are route leaders and so on. So if Susanne wants some German for her course, she will talk to Bert. Not that this has got anything to do with German.* In the ironic usage of the sign *leader*, it was actually put into non-verbal quotation marks (by using the gesture of raising the hands and wriggling the index and middle fingers of both hands), the speaker is distancing himself from the internal market mechanism and the language of management. The intended meaning contradicts customary meaning (Brown 1977). Similar examples are those that use the words "so-called" in front of a noun, e.g. our "so-called management". Following speech act theory, the person by speaking is simultaneously evoking and enacting the concept of leadership, market mechanisms and business, albeit in a negative way. Though the person cannot "escape" the language of management, all the person can do is to express its dissent by using an ironic voice. Although individuals can understand and articulate the paradoxes of organisational life, they cannot eliminate them (Handy 1994). Using sarcasms or the more subtle ironic vehicle are major tools in

expressing disagreement by creating distance between speaker and words and thereby they create distance between speaker and reality.

However, as I have argued in chapter four, irony is the tool of wit and intellectual potency, but it is powerless in terms of wording the world, though insightful in commenting on the such worded world. Irony has a metaphorical function, by throwing a new light on the status quo, but it does not use "new" words to bespeak the world. It is the voice of the critic, the observer, playfully describing the world-to-word fit and in doing so holding a mirror to its weaknesses. The sublimation of this voice into the collective whole is unlikely, creativity being the gift of the individual rather than the collective. Some research into irony, i.e. Hatch and Ehrlich 1993, contends that irony is able to transform organisational experiences by providing alternative, previously unthinkable propositions. In the examples of irony I found and discussed, this is not the case. Irony (and satire) do not provide alternative models, they ultimately are the weapon of astute criticism. If they were to provide alternative propositions, they would have to use new words.

The emergence of a dissenting collective voice takes a different form. At an open lunch time seminar, the topic of research and the lack of a "research culture" were discussed *until they buy into that [research - S.T.] ethos, it [the university] will not climb up excellence tables. Norman Graft says the school will become more research-oriented. We on the ground feel this is not true.* (27 February 1997). In this example voices are allocated to *they* as an anonymous collective representing the upper echelon of the



hierarchy and the unified *we* as it represents the *we on the ground*, the majority of staff and thereby the democratic principal. The agency claimed by the speaker is, as the other examples, expressed by a choice in pronouns (*we*) which is put into antithetical opposition with *they*. The third voice, personalised as the director, words the school by saying *it will become more research oriented*. The illocutionary force of his words is rejected, they cannot become "true", because of the lack of a research ethos. This is what *we* know to be true, but *they* need to buy into it. This dissenting voice is ideological in so far as it is a "shared, relatively coherently interrelated set of emotionally charged beliefs, values, and norms that bind some people together and help them to make sense of their worlds". (Trice and Beyer 1993:33). Of course, "reality" is more complex than to be encaptured by a simple "we" and "they" dichotomy, however "ideologies serve to make social situations comprehensible and meaningful. People naturally tend to simplify what they perceive; ideologies add to structure that simplification." In speaking the speaker claims agency. In introducing "we", "us" and "they" an ideological structure is introduced. Ideology fulfils four functions: catharsis, morality, solidarity and advocacy (Geertz 1964). The cathartic function is accomplished by the projection of blame to the anonymous collective *they*. The moral function is satisfied by legitimising the existence of the *we on the ground* in terms of higher values (*we feel this is not true*, i.e. we know the real truth). Solidarity links the "we" collective together - the "we" shares the habitat "ground". Finally, advocacy is fulfilled by calling attentions to strains (lack of research ethos). So, ideology, enacted in speech, is fulfilling several important function, but in the end it is a simplifying device (Weick 1979), which is largely dysfunctional. It "can lead to distorted perceptions of the

world, excessive deviance compared to other organisations, behavioural rigidity and stagnation, and the outside world seeing members as heretics and fanatics.” (Meyer 1982: 60).

There are also many other personal statements, disagreeing with the agency of the official voices. A personal statement (*I will not move into any open plan shit or I think it's a bit of a myth that academics at old universities do not do a lot of admin work,*) (fieldnotes in March 1997) is different from establishing oneself as a voice - which always includes a claim to represent the collective and thereby transcends the individual actor. Cases of irony are different - although they indirectly express personal opinion. They also transcend the individual by referring to intellectual superiority as their principal.

### **5.7. Theorising Speech Acts**

By conceptualising language as a linguistic and social performative, it becomes possible to explore the representative and declarative acts that are conducted when speaking.

Within a dynamic context speech acts both constitute, enact and create the world. The bi-directional fit (world-words, words-world) that speech acts can take were explored in order to shed light on the process via which organisational actors enact their organisational lives.

Metaphors such as the "glass-house" analogy have a bi-directional fit: they both describe (the here and now) and criticise as well as suggesting a better future world, where the



glass-house is taken to the seeds. Following this logic, by using metaphors speakers are speech acting: They are not only symbolic structures or an aesthetically pleasing embellishment - they are declarative speech acts with the claim for veracity and creating the world. Metaphors in particular may also function simultaneously as expressives - following the vividness thesis as expressed by Ortony (1975). Thus metaphorical speech acting entails visions of the future as much as it can evoke the pastures of the past, but it performs more than a representative and expressive function: It carries a declarative function, too.

The discussed metonymies (such as the discussed papers, the organisational stories, expressions such as *SBS needs to be moved forward*, *the school claims that*) have a similar bi-directional function in so far as they claim representative truth value (particularly the papers and reports), but they also (literally and metaphorically) "write" the future of the school. The organisational stories as told by my colleague in the peer interview had a representative function. They represented as true the world he had to live in, a world symbolising shifting power relations and arbitrariness. The effects were an adjustment in his behaviour, i.e. a perlocutionary adjustment. The dialectical dynamic between metaphorical and metonymical devices results in organisational symbolism. Furthermore, in using these devices the speakers make claims as to the "true" representation of the world, claims as to how interpret the past and shape the future. These existential claims to link past, present and future in speech acting metaphorical and metonymical devices are

expressed in language and through language use. Language is a symbolic system of signs with practical consequences.

The investigation of the dialectics between the pronouns "we" and "I" confirms the symbolism inherent in speech acting. Replacing "I" by "we" is a metaphorical device which is legitimised because both are pronouns and in so far similar, but they stand for a different number of persons (plural/singular). In addition, "we", is a metonymic device, because it encompasses a contiguity, a multitude of people, positions, even material settings or the artifact(s) (such as the photocopying machine) of the school. All of which are deleted into "we". "We" is therefore a default device, "we" needs to be decoded correctly based on implicit, cultural knowledge (see theorising in chapter four) into the plural pronoun "we". Following my reasoning in chapter four, the amalgamation of metaphorical and metonymical devices results in symbolism: Including the insights as gained within the framework of speech acts and pragmatics, the dynamic between the two devices results in symbolic acts and action. The evocation of voices, as agents of a higher entity, is a quasi-religious act substituting the transient with the eternal.

The organisation receives its voice via the speech acting of its members. Utterances such as *the school says, the university claims* are a combination of metonymies (achieved by acts of deleting the specific activities, actors, locations etc.) which allow the school to metaphorically speak or claim. Metonymical devices allow abstract constructs to become enacted in use. Of course, the school does not literally speak, it is the principal which is



spoken for by an individual actor who by dint of her authority of office claims agency on behalf of the principal. Thus, when using metonymical devices in organisational talk (including "written" communication) the actor claims agency by referring to a higher principal. The metaphysical connotation arises, because in doing so, individual actors transcend their transient individuality by resolution into the collective whole. The principal that agency is claimed for is an abstract construct, enacted and created through agency only - just like priests transcend their finiteness by being the principal's (God's) agents on earth.

The claim for agency can be based on evoking various principals resulting in a multitude of voices. In the examples I have discussed the principals which agents were referring to were intellectual potency, the (ideological) democratic principle, office and associated role, nearness to the people (*vox populi* - *vox dei*).

In chapter four I had understood the dialectical interplay of metaphorical and metonymical devices as simultaneously activating the integrative, the differentiation and the ambiguity paradigm of organisational culture (Meyerson and Martin 1988, 1994). I put forward the notion that organisational culture is a complex phenomenon consisting of various layers that simultaneously and dynamically interact with each other as to result in cultural understanding.

The contemplation and argument in this chapter led to the consideration of organisational voices who by engaging in speech acts claim agency on behalf of principals. Occurrences

of speech as "the one voice" on behalf of the school fall into the integration paradigm, where one voice expresses the demands and needs of the school. Examples are the voice of the director, be it internally at the open meeting or representing the school at university level. Similarly, Tom's attempt to establish himself as the voice of both the people and the management is an attempt to legitimise his agency on behalf of the formal as well as the informal organisation (Gray and Starke 1988). Dissenting voices (e.g. e-mail exchange with Godfrey, open lunch time seminar, uses of irony) represent the various constituencies based within the organisation. Values and their normative behavioural manifestations may be in opposition to the "one" voice. The assumptions of a common language need to be suspended, since semantic differences in signs (e.g. "management" as used in an ironic way or critical way implies a different meaning than it might in a meeting of the executive group) exist. Subcultures (Trice and Beyer 1984, Van Maanen and Barley 1984) or counter cultures (Martin and Siehl 1983) find their own voices and agency. Both the integrative and differentiation paradigms assume that stable boundaries exist. In the ambiguity paradigm this assumption does not exist. Boundaries are amorphous and permeable, new voices emerge, are heard for some time and then disappear, some voices lose all their authority, others lose it only partially and/or temporarily, others remain at the precarious boundaries of the organisation and ironically comment on organisational claims of consistency and consensus (examples that were used are the case of ironic wit, the fading of the voice of the director, the losing/finding voice of some members of the executive and so on). Also, one individual actor can take on several agencies simultaneously: *with my course leader hat on I am aware of the budget*



*constraints, as an academic I must disagree* (myself at meeting, 13 June 1997) indicating dual or split agency within the same person. March and Cohen (1986) and March and Olsen (1976) describe universities as "organised anarchies", embracing the ambiguity paradigm.

## **5.8. Summary and Critique**

In this chapter I closely examined and discussed instances of organisational talk with the help of speech act theories and pragmatics. Some questions left open at the end of chapter four were addressed, in so far as the organisational context (e.g. roles) was taken into account and issues around agency were investigated. The findings of this chapter are severalfold:

1. In speaking the world is both enacted and created (this becomes particularly clear when investigating declarative speech acts) in a dynamic and dialectic process of constitution and creation. This is how organisational actors make sense of their lives.
2. Speech acting leads to the emergence of individual actors who claim agency to speak and act as the voice on behalf of a higher principal.
3. The process of agency formation does sometimes follow quasi-religious processes of sublimation of the individual actor into the higher principal.

4. Metaphorical and metonymical devices can function as speech acts, while retaining their symbolic dialectics and bestowing symbolic power on acts.

5. Organisations consist of and enact multiple agencies. The interaction of these agencies and their voices confirms a concept of culture that is multi-layered and dynamic, resulting in the simultaneous enactment of integrative, differentiation and ambiguity paradigms.

At the beginning I set the boundaries for this chapter within a "narrow" definition , in which context is designed as being situational and organisational. A broader position held by pragmatics such as Mey says: "... but the users not only had to be discovered, they had to be positioned where they belonged: in their societal context. Context is to be taken here not only as the development basis for language user activity, but as the main conditioning factor making that activity possible." (1993: 287). These conditioning factors or societal factors can be society's institutions such as the family, the school, professional groups and so on. In the next chapter the wider context of SBS (or SBM) shall be reintroduced via a discursive discussion of the UK Higher Education environment and how external language practices impact on the organisational actors and their language use. Furthermore, it is within discourse studies rather than pragmatics that issues around power, hegemony and legitimisation can be discussed. Open questions at the end of this chapter are: In how far are the findings informed by a wider, societal, context? In how far



are they organisation-specific? Why do some voices succeed in claiming agency and why do others fail? What is the connection between language and power? Agreeing with Fairclough's criticism (1989) about speech acts/pragmatics, this chapter shall be concluded: "Social context is acknowledged but kept in its place, which does it less than justice." (p.9). In the next chapter I will investigate the role of language in maintaining and changing power relations in the UK's Higher Education environment in general and within the researched school in particular.

## **Chapter 6 Hegemony, Power and Discourse in Organisational Talk, Texts and Artifact(s)**

In the previous chapter speech act theory as developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1979) was utilised and applied to organisational talk and other sign systems. The performativeness and the social wrapping of language was established and the dual fit of speech acts was investigated, leading to the conclusion that words-to-world and world-to-words direction of fits both creates and enacts the organisation - subscribing to what Taylor and Cooren (1997) refer to as organisation-as-communication. Within the Austin/Searle theorising it becomes possible to investigate language as a socially determined performative. The discussion also included my own theorising about organisational tropes (metaphor, metonymy, irony) and looked at them from the perspective of their performative value. Following on from the questions raised by Taylor (1993) and Taylor and Cooren (1997), which were: “How do organisations come to enter the field of discourse, how is it possible to say ‘the school thinks’, ‘the university envisages’, the metaphor of “voice” was consulted in order to explain how organisations talk and think through their voice(s). Investigating the individuals, agents and principals, which constitute organisational voices, it became clear how the many voices of a diverse collective became the one voice of the organisation, how voices talk and (en)act the organisation. Integrating the metaphor of voice into the analysis clarified how language speakers evoke, in talking, not only individual points of view, but enact other principals, which are situated outside the individual such as ‘the organisation’, certain cognitive constructs, the spiritual even.

One of the questions I raised at the end of the previous chapter was ‘why do some voices achieve collective agency where others try and fail?’ This shall be addressed in this chapter by linking organisational tropes, organisational voices and their speech acting to the discourses around the Business School. This necessitates a different approach to writing this chapter in so far as it will include a discussion of the Higher Education (HE) environment based on the researched literature (mainly journal articles, books, PR material, government papers as appropriate) as well as using the data itself as a basis for theorising as done in previous chapters in the spirit of this ethnographic project. As in the previous chapter, metaphor, metonymy and irony provide the trajectory through which data is viewed.



## 6.1. Discourse and Discourse Analysis

Discussions about discourses, discourse analysis, power and language have become commonplace in the debates of organisation theory and beyond (Cohen & Musson 1996, Mumby and Cloir 1997). It is beyond the nature and scope of this thesis to provide a detailed account of every conceptualisation, development and application of the discourse concept to organisational settings or to social settings.

Discourse is a difficult concept, because so many conflicting and overlapping definitions have been formulated (see for example van Dijk 1985 and 1997a, 1997b, McConnel 1986) or as Sherzer (1987) points out, Bakhtian ‘translinguistics’ as grounded in the concepts of voice, dialogicality and ventriloquation overlaps with the study of what is called in contemporary practice “pragmatics” or “discourse”.

In the previous chapter the “social wrapping” and “performative force” of language was established - which to some extent means having conducted a discourse analysis:

“analysing language use in speech and writing as a form of social practice.” (Fairclough and Wodack 1997: 258) in so far as language was viewed as a social construct.

Furthermore, the discussion of the dual fit of speech acts was shown to both create and enact a socially constructed world, which in turn can be related to some of the practices entailed in discourse analysis “(...) the discursive event is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them. To put the same point in a different way, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially shaped” (p.258)

The difference between this and the previous chapter will be that this chapter will concern itself with the issues that arise from the social importance of language: Issues of power, ideology and hegemony. In particular, Foucault's work has generated huge interest in discourse analysis from a social scientist point of view to the neglect of a more linguistic approach to discourse analysis. It is in particular the critical discourse analysts (Kress and Hodge 1979, Fowler et al 1979, Hodge and Kress 1989) that start their analysis from actual talk and text. Norman Fairclough, in particular, developed a linguistically driven approach to discourse analysis over Foucault's more abstract approach.

Expanding on Fairclough's (1989, 1992) textually oriented discourse analysis (TODA) the interpretation within the chapter concentrates on the investigation of tropes, which are only partially integrated within Fairclough's methodology. However, in many regard his methodology is similar to the methodology I developed in chapters four and five. Both methodologies draw on linguistic/text-oriented frameworks to explore language use and both emphasise the importance of practical applied projects.

Supplementing the analysis of chapters four and five, in this chapter the relationship between language as a social performative and relationships of power are more closely scrutinised. Thus, a critical approach (Fairclough 1989) to the study of language in an organisational setting is conducted. The 'critical' being the analysis of connections and



causes that are hidden (as indeed has been partly done by investigating the normally hidden contiguities of metonymical devices) and the discussion of how these are produced by underlying assumptions. When uttering sentences such as *We all need to learn the language of marketing* or *We need to fine-tune our products to market needs. We have not done this in the past and it needs to be managed better* (Fieldnotes, taken at strategy day June 1996), the speakers are not necessarily aware which ‘voices’ they enact and which audience they evoke - other than the spatially and temporarily present audience. The “hidden assumptions” (Mey 1993: 187) that govern everyday situations of language use and the hidden voices that are expressed are made more explicit in this chapter.

The rationale for this chapter is, therefore, to further supplement the analysis as conducted in chapters four and five by establishing and discussing the linkages between wider macro discourses and their utilisation and adaptation in the chosen organisational setting. While my theorising on tropes and how they are used provides the bedrock for data exploration, Fairclough’s methodology (1989, 1992) contributes to the analysis a method how micro and macro analysis can be linked.

Data exploration is to include the analysis of spoken language, texts and - again expanding on Fairclough’s approach - artifacts such as buildings.

Finally, Fairclough’s paradigmatic stance is, which within the Burrell and Morgan (1979) framework falls within the radical humanist paradigm, “developing a sociology

of radical change from a subjectivist point of view” (p.32), whereas the espoused paradigm for this thesis is the interpretive paradigm and its concerns to understand the world as it is at the level of subjective experience. Of course, understanding power relations as enacted in the organisational setting and how they relate to the wider environment forms part of the understanding process itself.

Before this analysis is conducted, some voices as they are occurring in the contemporary HE environment shall be described in order to then investigate if and how they are used in the chosen organisational setting. The methodology as developed in particular in chapter four and as widened in chapter five i.e. a particular focus on organisational tropes, will be further developed and metonymies and metaphors of the environment will be compared to tropes as they were found in organisational talk, text and artifact(s). “New” data will be integrated in the analysis as will previously used data as to deepen the discussion and contribute to the development of a complex model of language and language use.

## **6.2. Discourses in Higher Education**

The following summary is based on having researched the available literature until early 1998. However, even this apparent ‘factual’ report of the historical and political developments is, of course, biased and as such expressing a reasoned opinion as formed on the basis of the literature, as well as my life and professional experience. No one of the identified discourses is value-free or presents an objective reality.



There has never been one undisputed model of the idea and purpose of the university (Hammersley 1992). However, recent changes in the 1980s and 1990s in particular in funding mechanisms have seen the whole sector in a state of turmoil, leading to an “identity crisis” (Peters 1992, Wasser 1990, Wyatt 1993). The ideas about the organisation and practice of HE are informed by conflicting assumptions. Following on from Hammersley (1992) one can distinguish between a liberal, economic and ideological model of the university. Within Britain and indeed in Europe and the Western world the different values and assumptions of the economic and the liberal model are the focus of the debate (Shore 1992, Wasser 1990, Wyatt 1993). It is against this background that this debate shall be reviewed.

Within the liberal model of the university academics are in pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and disseminate it in the spirit of academic autonomy, i.e. one is accountable only on academic grounds to academic authorities and one’s peers. It stands in the tradition of German humanism and attaches itself to the ideal of the “exemplary life form” (Humboldt 1956), where the search for truth should be combined with an ambition to live a correct life. Whether this ideal ever materialised is doubtful (Habermas 1987), but the concept of academic independence and educational values pervade the concept of the liberal university. ‘Academic independence’ and ‘educational values’ are concepts, which are, of course, based on certain assumptions

about the ‘best’ way of being an academic and educating students. The ‘best way’ is as ideological as the ‘best way’ proposed by what I will call the ‘economic discourse’.

The need to transform the small elite universities of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century into a system of mass higher education was achieved within the UK by phases of expansion and by promoting to full university status the university colleges and awarding university status (1992) to polytechnics (Trow 1994). Against this background of emerging mass education, universities are assessed within the parameters of the “economic model” as providers of efficient provision of training, the dissemination of knowledge as a utilitarian means and universities as organisations that need to be managed effectively (Trow 1994).

It is obvious that the resourcing of an expanding higher education sector has always been problematic and efforts to make British universities more responsive to the economic needs of the country have quite a long history. However, since 1979, the year which saw the election of the conservative party to government, the view that the nature of universities as it then was is incorrect and disadvantageous to Britain has been formulated (Cowen 1991). A series of government papers, legislation and rearrangement of funding mechanisms have seen the introduction of market forces and values into British HE: “The determined and enthusiastic espousal of market values in academic life is revolutionary and radical.” (Pritchard 1994:253). The organisation, processes and practices of HE are today conceptualised within an economic discourse of



the free market economy. The reorientation of the purpose of British universities has had consequences for the “governance” of the universities. Within the economic discourse the term “governance” is to be substituted by “management”, indeed as some critics have it (Cowen 1991, Trow 1994) by “managerialism”, which has become “the new faith” (Trow 1994:11). By adding the suffix “ism” Trow shows it as the expression of ideological intentions, which ultimately venture to turn universities into “organisations similar enough to ordinary commercial forms so that they can be assessed and managed in roughly similar ways.” (p.11).

When scanning the literature on HE one finds plenty of sources that uncritically and unreflectively use the language of business to capture whatever issue or situation in the context of HE. These texts share the lack of any explicit rationale of why this jargon is used and what their conceptual bases are. A recent article in *Higher Education* (Rudzki 1995) draws on the methodology of a standard text book of strategic management (Johnson and Scholes 1989) to provide a prescriptive model for the management of internationalisation processes of HE institutions. In a similar vein and to varying standards Hart and Shoolbred (1993), Gray (1992), Kennerley (1992) and Peeke (1994) use concepts taken from the area of business and management and apply them to situations in universities in an unproblematic way. Though I would not dispute that it is feasible and at times necessary, it needs to be done in an informed and careful fashion (Middlehurst and Elton 1992, Etzkowitz and Peter 1991). The occasional “missionary” tone of some of the articles and the simplistic usage of easy prescriptions taken out of a

different context reveal their hidden assumptions, which are that I) the economic/managerial model is superior to the governance/academic model and II) that universities are economic entities to be run in the spirit of free market forces.

On the other hand there are texts that are written within the liberal/academic tradition and defensive of this type on the grounds of its intellectual and moral superiority (Aviram 1992, McGregor 1993, Shils 1989, Wyatt 1993), texts that critically reflect the impacts of the changes on institutions or various aspects of organisational life (Buchbinder 1993, Grosby 1992, Hammersley 1992, Peters 1992, Pritchard 1994, Salter and Tapper 1995, Scott 1993, Shattock 1992, Tight 1994, Valimaa and Westerheijden 1995, Wasser 1990, Wright 1989), texts that strive to develop a new understanding of universities, incorporating ideas and assumptions of both the academic and economic discourses (Bertisoon 1992, Etzkowisty and Peters 1991, Finnegan 1992, Harman 1989, Middlehurst and Elton 1992, Stewart 1992), texts that contextualise the changes in the wider area of a postindustrial society (Aviram 1992, Finnegan 1992, Taskser and Packham 1994).

Other contributions, e.g. Ritzer (1996), Darwin (1996), Parker and Jary (1995) see HE institutions exposed to a global process of McDonaldization, “the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world”. (Ritzer 1996: 1). Parker and Jary (1995) talk of the NEW HIGHER EDUCATION (NHE) as self-justifying, but incredibly “efficient machine” (p.336) and the changes that have been incurred during



the transformation from an elite to a mass education system. They discuss, critically, the implications of the McUniversity and comment on “the language of ‘line managers’, ‘customers’ and ‘products’ [that] begins to displace the academic language of deans, students and courses.” (p.324 - 325). Fairclough (in particular in 1993, but also in 1989 and 1992) applies critical discourse analysis, a methodology developed by him to (UK) universities and the marketization of public discourse and concludes that: “The situation can be conceived of in terms of an absence within the order of discourse: the absence of language - of discursive practices - through which authority relations and institutional and professional identities different from either traditional or marketized forms can be constituted”. (p.159). The absence of an alternative discourse (“voice”) different from the economic/management or academic/traditional discourses points to the need to develop a “new” language as a key element “in building resistance to marketization without simply falling back on tradition.” (p.159).

The polytechnics were created to pursue a more vocational mission and become a new form of “urban community” (Robinson 1968). They were to be different from universities, rather than inferior (Silver 1990). Within the expanding HE sector most of Britain’s polytechnics were granted university status in 1992 (Whiter Paper 1991). Their mission was to ensure that HE was to “produce” graduates with the knowledge and skills repertoire as required by industry and commerce. As institutions their allegiance has always been closer to the vocational and professional field than that of their older counterparts. The notion long held in British universities for example that the best form of training is intellectual and within a single discipline has never been

held as strongly by the polytechnics, who have been much more active in designing multi-discipline courses with an applied focus. In terms of their structure the polytechnics inherited from their technical college days a more hierarchical design, more akin to traditional business structures (Middlehurst and Elton 1992), rather than to a cybernetic model of governance linked to the “old” universities (Birnbaum 1988 and 1989, Cohen and March 1986, Lutz 1982, Middlehurst and Elton 1992). However, with the new university status, research activities are beginning to figure as a priority on the agendas of some of the former polytechnics. It is within this triangular area of tension between hierarchical structures, collegial and egalitarian aspirations of the academics and the newly added research orientation that both the role and practice of teaching and research activities within the former polytechnics will have to change. Middlehurst and Elton (1992) suggest that the more important research activities become, the less will hierarchical management structures be the best way to facilitate these practices, which need a more collegial culture associated with the cybernetic model of governance.

Within a former polytechnic - and particularly so within a former faculty of management - the usage of business language could be viewed as unproblematic and the arrival of new managerial philosophies could be welcomed, rather than shunned. The use of administrative vocabulary for instance to describe processes of course management or other procedures is generally accepted. The use of signs such as ‘business plan’, ‘human resource planning’, ‘leadership’ (e.g. course leader, programme leader, team leader, unit leader etc.) is borrowed from the world of commerce.



Staff themselves demand better management (*We are in a mess. Why hasn't this been managed properly?* - Fieldnote, 9. June 1997). However, some of the findings of this project, in particular the use of organisational irony, suggest that this is not necessarily the case and the metaphorical substitution of signs such as “student” with “customer”, which indicates a shift from the academic discourse to the economic one, are indeed not as straightforward and unproblematic an appropriation of meaning as they might appear on the surface.

In summary, in this chapter a discourse analysis of organisational talk, text and artifacts will be conducted. The methodology will be to use organisational tropes as the mechanisms of analysis, some of Fairclough's outlined TODA will be included in the analysis. In addition, and to finalise the research part of this thesis, the linkage between language, language use and the (re) production of ideology, hegemony in environmental discourses as they manifest themselves in the organisational setting shall be explored.

### **6.3. Instances of Organisational Talk, Texts and Artifact(s)**

As in the previous chapters instances of the above are investigated in the light of organisational tropes. Expanding on the previous discussion issues around ordering mechanisms and power and knowledge are researched. Therefore, organisational practices, in particular Human Resource practices, form part of this chapter. It needs to be noticed, that the main purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on previous insights, but that some of the major insights of this thesis into the functioning and usage of

organisational tropes have already been established. By conducting a discourse analysis, a critical element linking the use of tropes to the occurrence of hegemony and power will be added.

### **6.3.1. The Manufacture of Consent**

When I returned to work after a three months absence in February 1997, the school appeared to be in perpetual crisis. The consequences of changes in the external funding regime, the poor reception of internal quality reports and processes by the university's management and governors, the publication and potential consequences of the Dearing report together with a move into a new building, the BITC = Business Information and Technology Centre, (which implied a radical break with the established Dyson-Totley dichotomy) resulted in a period of unrest, which was furthered by far reaching changes in senior positions and a restructuring of the school and its support structure. Against this background, the creation of consent, a feeling of togetherness as to *pull us through this time* (Fieldnote, 10 June 1997, manager) was deemed to be necessary.

In the previous chapter 'new voices' were discussed in the context of speech acting, but also as establishing themselves as the legitimate voice of the people, i.e. staff in non-managerial positions. The "crisis announcement" took place at an open staff meeting (20 March 1997, Dyson House, room 516), which I have described in some detail. For the purpose of this chapter, the words of one of the 'new voices' shall be recited:



*What does it all mean? No one knows. That type of discussion should have started earlier on, but it didn't. We've got into a mess, but it's an opportunity. I am like everyone else, I would like a big office, big desk. I came down here to Dyson. I walk through the corridors and never see anyone, unless they pop their heads out of their offices. There's no community. We never see each other.*

To reiterate, the interplay of pronouns, the way the change in Tom's position in the metonymical arrangement of the school (move from Totley to Dyson) was used to create an impression of 'nearness' to the people and the metaphorical transportation of the audience, led to the emergence of a new voice. According to Fairclough (1992) and van Dijk (1997) the existence and usage of pronouns are a sign of ideological discourse (which is consistent with my own findings on dissenting collective voices) in so far as "all expressions featuring pronouns that represent social groups, most typically so for the polarised pronouns us and them" (van Dijk 1997:32) are ideological. The social grouping Tom is evoking are the members of staff linked to the metonymical set-up of the school (*Down to Dyson*); the managerial group associated with Totley/the Old Hall and those associated with Dyson House. However, by spanning a bridge between the two sides by moving physically *down to Dyson*, a move of strong symbolic value, he is overcoming the polarised dichotomy. These are not words of ideology, but the language of constructing alliances and integrating groups into an effective whole, i.e. into the reified organisation. "Hegemony is about constructing alliances, and integrating rather than simply dominating subordinate class [groups - S.T.], through concessions or through ideological means to win their consent." (Fairclough 1992: 92). In hegemonial discourse the language of building bridges replaces the language of

ideological domination. One might argue that the means, rather than the end, have changed.

As I previously argued, this instance is characterised by ambiguity in so far that one could argue that by the time of the meeting the ‘locus of power’ had already begun to shift away from Totley and *to gravitate towards the City Centre*. (Fieldnote, 2. June 1997, a colleague).

In general, the words *I am like you* or similar expressions of equality as uttered by members of the newly composed managerial groups were used more often than before the restructuring. When discussing this with a colleague, she said *Well, they need to be seen to be different from the old ones, though I think Peter is genuine*. (Fieldnote, a colleague, 11 September 1997). The distancing of the “managerial elite” (*You got to get yourself a promotion, then you move to Totley, then you try to distance yourself completely by moving up the hill [= Old Hall]*, Fieldnote, 26 February 1996, a colleague) from their colleagues was commented on frequently and with great resentment. The new discourse of integration and equality needs to be seen against the history of the school. Additionally, some of the more open power markers, such as location in Totley, disappeared when the move into the new building and its open plan arrangement had been finalised. In the previous chapter this open meeting (20 March 1997), where Tom established himself as a new voice, was theorised mainly from a “dramaturgical” perspective (Goffman 1959, Höpfl and Maddrell 1996). Based on the



current analysis I would like to argue that this interpretation needs to be expanded to include a political perspective in so far as alliances are created, a “bridge” between the Dyson and the Totley site is built (*I moved down to Dyson*). Notwithstanding the discourse of integration and consensus, Tom is nevertheless using his professional rhetoric (Strauss et al 1981) to impose his definition of the school’s situation on the audience. Thus, articulating his ideology, ie belief system, he is able to use the public arena to render this belief system a “shared or collective set of (...) ideas”. (Strauss et al 1981:8), whereas other “voices”, who were raised during the months of transformation, remained unheard.

The existence of ideological intent in hegemonic discourse may be less explicit, the wording of utterances less confrontational, but in the end the ‘new voices’ are still part of the economic/managerial discourse as privileged over the academic discourse. It is for this reason that voices who constitute themselves within the economic/managerial discourse are more powerful and more frequently heard in the public parts of the organisational arena. However, it shall be assumed that people are not necessarily aware of the ideological/hegemonial weight of their words.

However, language speakers cannot position themselves outside the wider environmental discourses and enact “ideal speech situations” (Habermas 1981) without any strategic intent. By talking in a certain role in front of people speakers are invoking the organisational principals they enact. The organisational principal is the school, the

university and its management in an environment that is as a matter-of-fact being perceived as becoming more competitive. Therefore, ensuring that the organisation remains competitive and thereby ensuring survival is the prime function of management. Thus saying *We need to move the school forward* (open meeting, 10 September 1997) is placing the school in an competitive environment while ensuring that the effort is a shared one (using the hegemonial “we” as an integrating device).

In terms of social constructivism “the school” is enacted daily based on shared elements of meaning (Smircich 1983), however by metonymical dint one can talk about “the school” as an object. As a reified metonymy the school becomes manageable and controllable in a functionalist way. In terms of a critical analysis and awareness of language, the combination of metonymies (such as “the school”, “the uni”) with a metaphorically used verb (such as “needs to be moved forward”, “thinks”) not only results in organisational symbolism as demonstrated in chapter four, but reifies the school into an object rather than a living, changing, socially constructed process. An object is easier to control, to be made subject to the speaker’s (and by hegemonial “we”) the audience’s will. The reification of constructs - though in itself a contradiction which manifests itself in the impossibility of controlling the organisation and yet ever increasing efforts to do so - is making assumptions about the nature of organisations that are in line with the functionalist paradigm (Burrell and Morgan 1979), such as its problem-oriented approach and its emphasis on providing practical solutions. Resorting to practices that provide quantifiable measurement/outcomes (such as performance



appraisal) are manifestations of the functionalist thinking and its tradition of positivism which in turn is linked to the assumptions of managerial practice.

On a personal level many colleagues in a managerial position admitted the problems of managing on a functionalist premise (*there's no such thing as the one best way; I bear it all with resigned enlightenment* - Fieldnote, 12 January 1996). These observations are representatives of their positions as managers in a functionalist world as well as heart-felt expressives of individuals finding themselves in these positions. Despite the irrationality of the rational system (Weber 1921, Ritzer 1996) individuals captured in its discursive practices drive themselves and are driven to redouble their efforts rather than to rethink their assumptions.

### Normalisation

Consent may also be achieved by bestowing on organisational events and practices the status of 'being normal'. In particular, in socialisation processes, the transition of a state of 'feeling strange' to a state of 'feeling normal' indicates in how far newcomers have adjusted to (Jablin 1987) and internalised (Jablin 1982) the consensual status quo.

Newcomers to an organisation become socialised through daily interactions with other individuals in the workplace (Boud 1990) "by gaining an appreciation of what is normal in the workplace". (Louis 1980: 89) Whether this appreciation follows interactions with peers (Bridge and Baxter 1992, Kramer 1995 ), mentors (Kram 1983 and 1986) or

senior colleagues, the assimilation process (Jablin 1982, 1987) integrates the new member into the cultural milieu of the organisation. Shock and surprise at the time of entry (Waneous 1992) is a good starting point to reflect on what is considered to be normal (Louis 1985). The socialisation process is a communicative process (Manning, 1973), during which one has to learn a new language (Basso 1967). The process of doing so involves the (partial) replacement of established meaning systems and discourses with new ones and thereby a repositioning of the subject position including its interactional routines becomes necessary.

In one of the newcomer interviews we discussed the colleague's experience and impressions of her first teaching semester:

Colleague: *They [students] were extremely vocal, demanding. But demanding the wrong thing, not demanding more to learn. In the second semester they were rather quiet and pleasant, but they still wanted so much.*

Myself: *What were they demanding?*

Colleague: *They weren't demanding of me personally. But of the university, the course itself, that they were not happy with the terms we provide. Very much the 'customer talk', you know. (16. July 1996).*

My colleague positions herself in an academic discourse in which “demanding the right thing” is driven by a desire to learn whereas “demanding the wrong thing” is related to the “customer talk” and issues related to the terms of the product, i.e. “the course” they are buying. Interestingly, she is using a verbal construction for the “right” thing (to learn) but a noun for the “wrong” thing (the course, the uni) conceptualising teaching as a process as opposed to an object/product, which signifies linguistically her preference



for a subject position within the academic discourse. By the second teaching semester she had adapted her behaviour:

*OK, I was less encouraging to hear their complaints. I also tried to be well informed about details, deadlines, exams and stuff, but if they are not happy with the course, well I can't help. May be they need to see the course manager.*(interview 16. July 1996).

In terms of interactive practices, her behaviour has become less process-oriented and more product-oriented in so far as she informed herself better about the administrative side of her unit. In terms of the “customer talk” (discourse) she is now providing “better quality”. However, from the overall product (the course) she has distanced herself - referring to the course manager as the appropriate contact. Her learning includes insights into the ordering of the product areas and therefore she has become a more effective part of the organisation as a service deliverer. This incident of learning does not mean that she has stopped to construct her subject position as an academic and teacher (in fact, she won a research fellowship shortly after and has left to work for an “old” university), but this instance indicates an adjustment of interactional practices in line with the economic discourse. It becomes “normal”, common-sense to behave in certain ways (Geertz 1983, Halls 1986). The normalisation of the meaning of words (student - customer, course - product, academic - facilitator/manager), the naturalisation of situations types (teaching/learning process - delivery of service) “become the common-sense practice of the institution.” (Fairclough 1989: 107) which are linked to a certain organisational order (relationship between lecturer, students and course manager). Normalisation is an instrument of power: “In a sense, the power of normalisation imposes homogeneity, but it individualises by making it possible to

measure gaps, to determine links, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another.” (Foucault 1977c:198 in Burrell 1988). In this instance her “deviant” behaviour became measurable/observable and led to an adjustment to norms (providing more customised information to students, but withdrawing some of her personal commitment), thus contributing to increasing organisational hegemony.

The question arises whether this instant of learning is significant, after all, ‘playing games’ forms part of many activity one engages in. Isn’t her adjusted practice mere rhetoric, surface behaviour to get things done more easily? However, many instances of learning accumulate as to become part of one’s professional identity (Boud 1990). This process is reinforced by listening to the “customer talk”, “leadership talk”, “product talk” and related practices that abound in the school and which have become “common-sense” in the school and other HE institutions (Fairclough 1993). Thus statements such as *our portfolio of products, we need to become more market oriented*. (Fieldnotes, 1996) indicate “the restructuring of the order of discourse on the model of more central market forces.” (Fairclough 1993: 143).

Normalisation is further strengthened by information overload. During recruitment time, e-mails updating the current numbers were sent to members of the organisation on a daily basis, including comparative data to the University’s immediate “competitors” as well as historic data, comparing recruitment figures with previous years. Also, photocopies of information stressing the “seriousness” of the competitive environment



are distributed recurrently. For example, a photocopy of an article in the THES (Budget Blight on Universities, December 1995) was put in pigeon holes by some subject leaders (i.e. line managers) together with the ironic annotation “Happy New Year”. Thus the “brute facts” of the market are recurrently reinforced until they become “true”.

The common-sensical nature of the economic discourse in everyday use becomes difficult to dispute or to deny; equally difficult would be to defy how it shapes the social relations which are enacted in discourse. The normalisation process as achieved by the metaphorical substitution of signs “hides” the assumptions of the economic discourse. In a similar vein, re- and overwording contribute to the process of rendering certain practices normal. With regards to metaphorical substitution processes of signs (such as “student” with “customer”) the meaning relations between other signs is changed too, so as to produce “normal”, “common-sensical” interpretation within the dominant discourse. Following on from Fairclough’s (1989) methodology rewording and overwording are indicators for “ideologically significant meaning relations (...) between words” (p.111) in so far as the hidden meaning is reinforced, albeit in various ways.

Recently written brochures for SBS’s postgraduate courses demonstrate the intent to sell “a product”. In the case of the course I am currently responsible for the first page contains four references to *managerial competencies* or *skills, competencies and knowledge* which are in terms of text cohesion linked to *enhance career prospects, maximise the employment and career prospects, becoming a competent manager and a*

*successful career in management* (see appendix 3 for extract taken from brochure). Of course, a brochure is a metonymical artifact, which collapses into a total metaphorical interpretation to symbolise the “hard sale tool” or in Fairclough’s terminology the brochure is an example of the increasing “promotional discourse” (1993). The brochure combines elements of different “genres”, i.e. functional categories, in so far as it seeks to provide information (in its second half), but it firstly uses promotional elements as realised in the use of colours, logos, shading mechanisms and so on. In addition to selling this particular course, there are elements of corporate advertising about SHU, SBS, the BITC building, the virtual campus as well as one section that provides information. These structuring mechanisms draw on different discourses, e.g. advertising/promotional discourse, educational discourse. In doing so, it uses interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 1992) which draws on orders of discourse by using elements of texts which are conventionally associated with particular discourses.

The linking of *managerial competence* with *career prospects/enhancement* is based on the principle of causal contiguity (do this course, thereby improve managerial competencies and therefore improve career prospects) which is expressed on the level of text cohesion in so far as the subordinate clause is linked to the main clause (*The course provides the opportunity to study all relevant business functions, learn about and develop managerial competencies, gain an internationally recognised degree, which will all enhance career prospects.*)



The examples drawn from this brochure constitute instances of overwording that reveal the preoccupation in the brochure with the projection of the course as providing managerial competencies, skills, which “rewords” the reader (i.e. potential students or customers) as subjects with untapped managerial potential, which can act confidently and competently in today’s *increasingly competitive environment, the changing environment, today’s competitive framework*.

In reading this text, two things are likely to happen to the reader(s): They will be undergoing the process of anticipatory socialisation (Jablin 1987) and they will experience the beginning of their constitution as managers whose future is (*Managing the Future* is the interwoven theme of all brochures) to courageously and competently act in hostile and difficult circumstances. The constitution of subject positions within the promotional discourse contains an element of romanticism that is flattering to the individual on the brink of engaging itself in this discourse.

The question of ‘authorship’ is an interesting one. Although course leaders had been involved in the writing of the texts for their respective brochures - a process which was rushed through at the end of the year. When the brochures finally returned from printing, the amendments and suggestions I had made had been ignored. When inquiring about this I was advised that “the Centre” had ignored the suggestions. As a result, much of the factual information was wrong and a particularly ignorant and misleading sentence (*you will be taught by academics with real business experience*) which I had taken out had been reinserted. The emphasis on ‘the real world’ and

*academics with real business* experience implicitly assumes the existence of a ‘less real’ or ‘unreal world’ and by the slightest causal extension a ‘less worthy’ world, i.e. the university.

In another instance taken from a meeting of the Staff Development Review Group (SDR group) similar occurrences of overwording happened when designing the new SDR form. In particular the signs ‘objective’, ‘outcome’, ‘aim’ and ‘target’ were difficult to distinguish from each other. Finally, it was decided to be consistent in use and to use ‘aim’ for short-terms ‘aims’ and ‘objectives’ for long term goals. ‘Outcomes’ and ‘targets’ were not to be used as they were *too technically loaded with appraisal and rewards and salaries and so on*. (Group member 16 October 1996). The underlying assumptions are those of the economic/managerial discourse which translates a priori assumptions into organisational practices. The overwording is an indication of the target orientation of the economic discourse and its emphasis on quantifiable outcomes, which determine the discussions from their very beginning and which were never seriously queried.

#### **6.4.     Categorising: What is an Academic?**

Metonymical devices are ordering mechanisms. In terms of a grammatical system they order the way signs are strung together by determining their position in a sentence. As was shown in chapter four, they also can be used to analyse the geographical arrangement of the school and how it is interpreted as being connected to a certain



hierarchical order. The mechanisms of this was the simultaneous exercising of combination and deletion of signs based on the principle of contiguity, i.e. a metonymic device. Thus saying *The Old Hall has done this* is using the container for contained principle which is recognised within the overall meaning system of the school, because it is an instance of a general principal. In an example I gave in chapter five about new voices, *the Catherines and Toms*, the two names were given to comprehend a category as a whole (the new generation claiming its place in senior organisational functions). In reasoning and discussing these examples, a part (a subcategory or member or submodel) stands for the whole category: Two individual names stand for the group of all “new voices”. The reasoning is based on using a metonymical model to express categories to which organisational members belong. Metonymic models function as categorisation/ordering mechanisms (Lakoff 1987) in the overall meaning system. Lakoff demonstrates this with the category ‘mother’ which is a “cluster model” (p.76) and cannot be defined “once and for all, in terms of common necessary and sufficient conditions.” (p.76), since there are biological mothers, donor mothers, surrogate mothers, adoptive mothers, unwed mothers, stepmothers ...., but there are nevertheless “ideal cases” (p.76.) which are considered prototypes and where all ‘mothers’ converge by virtue of their relations to the ideal case.

I would like to argue that a similar argument can be established for the category ‘academic’ which is a construction and as such applies to an open-ended class of cases, not a fixed list. No fixed agreement about ‘what is an academic’ exists, but that there is

nevertheless a subcategory that “has a socially recognised status as standing for the category as whole, usually for the purpose of making quick judgements about people.” (p. 79) and that this subcategory is linked to a preferred order, which privileges some categories over others. It derives from the economic/managerial discourse.

In the interviews I did not directly ask any my colleagues “how do you define yourself as an academic”, rather issues around self-definition, sense-making and self-understanding led to the either explicit or implicit deliberation of the category ‘academic’ and how my colleagues saw themselves in relation to the ideal prototype. The discussions within the peer interviews revealed very different clusters about the category.

*Claude: When I used to work in FE I used to enjoy ‘Return to Studies’ anyone over the age of twenty-three who wanted to return to education and I used to teach them English (...). And there is a chap there who is about forty, and I was teaching on the top floor and I said “Has anyone every noticed how water always starts freezing at the top and then works down?” And I spent about an hour and a half talking to these people about autumn. And, so at the end I needed to give some homework and I guess, it just seemed right to give them something to write about autumn. “What do you want us to write?” “Anything.” Following week this chap came in and he said “Look at this for us”. First poem he had ever written. That is, what provoked action like that and here, isn’t that sense to me that feels like something has been achieved. But here it doesn’t feel. (26 February 1997).*

My colleague describes his being a teacher as a transformational process, which enables a middle-aged, possibly working class “chap” (*Read this for us* - marker of dialect as well as marker of informality) to re-see the minutiae of everyday “drabness” through a



poetic way of seeing, adding (possibly) beauty and truth to his existence. This existential experience is compared only briefly, but significantly, to his present existence which is devoid of that sense of achievement. The category of academic as “transformational teacher” forms the bedrock of defining his current subject position which is characterised by the absence of the above category, rendering his experience within the school *soulless, no heart really*.

During other peer interviews (this particular one turned into a peer group interview) a different category emerged.

*Holly: Well, I am doing different things. In terms of recruitment I am evolving the marketing role. A few things we tried last summer worked very well. Now, the plan is to take it forward and have a strategy and take it forward and do it again. There's large demand out there, but there are also more competitors springing up all over the place (...). It [my role] is a bit of a mix, a marketing person and a lecturer (...). We are facilitating these people through their learning, no matter of their academic background. Academic quality it whatever they need in order to help them learn.*

*Daniel: Anyway, I think we are lecturers, because lecturing is teaching. We do a lot of that, we are academics, and em, but quite often I find I run around sorting out what other people should have done and that's my main barrier. I could get all my teaching done, I could get all my admin done, I could get all my research done, if I was left on my own. (2 February 1997).*

In these quotations an ‘academic’ is defined in relation to different roles or activities such as a teacher/lecturer/facilitator, administrator, marketer and - in passing - as a researcher. Acting as a teacher is ‘facilitating learning’ for the students. And being an academic is associated with teaching, researching and administering, though the marker

*but* indicates a deviation from being an ‘ideal’ academic’ since organisational incompetence prevents the speaker from achieving the ideal subject position.

Finally, a mature member described her perception of herself as follows.

*Martha: We gave priority to the students, widening access, new teaching approaches, pastoral roles. The research we did was very different and defined differently in those days. It wasn't so much linked to income and publications, to bring in money and publications and the right sort of publications, don't do that, because it won't help for the RAE exercise and so on. (17 July 1996)*

She describes herself as a teacher and researcher, although within these categories she distinguishes between research “now and then”, with the “now” subcategory being linked to measurable outcomes (income generation, number of RAE-countable publications).

From these three extracts, different models of ‘academic’ can be inferred. The transformational teacher, the facilitator-teacher, the researcher, the researcher as income provider, the marketer. The sign and category ‘academic’ is filled with different meanings, depending on the individual, its context and circumstances. The particularisation process (Ortony 1975) is in itself flexible in so far as different meanings can be attributed to one sign (= academic). The position as marketer/facilitator is clearly driven from within the economic discourse and its practices such as the development of new markets and delivering customer satisfaction. On the other hand the academic as transformational teacher category is driven by the academic discourse and its developmental, metaphorical processes. The subcategory



‘researcher’ is linked to the economic discourse and its dictate of income generation and quantification. Naturally, as the unfolding sections of the interviews would demonstrate the discourses overlap: The “marketer” is writing a doctoral thesis (although the reason is that *it’s what you need in this industry*) , “the transformer” is *updating the unit spec, so they are easier to read*, “the mature colleague” is *adjusting my behaviour. So in each piece I write, some is for teaching, some for publications*. The different conceptual systems that are in operation affect all subjects, even if it is against their preferred value system. In all quotations I found that the economic discourse was providing the meaning system which sets the boundaries of definitions and outside whose parameters subject constitution is impossible, unless one would leave “the system”.

If metonymic models are ordering categories within which subcategories are understood as deviations from the central model, the question arises “which is the central model”, that determines the experience of all organisational members and against which they are reviewing their definitions and revisiting their practices? The analysis showed that the dominant model derives from the prevalent economic discourse, such the teacher/facilitator, the researcher/income provider outweigh the influence of the teacher/transformer (and its “less dramatic” subcategory the teacher/carer model). However, in terms of the organisational talk, even though subject positions within the economic discourse cannot be evaded, the formation of the subject positions within its parameters raises questions, paradoxes and instances of resistance. In terms of the ordering of discourses, the economic one is clearly outweighing the academic one.

If metonymies and metonymical models rely on habitually and conventionally known and accepted everyday facts (or prejudices), “We must already know that the objects are related, if the metonymy is to be devised and understood.” (Bredin 1984: 57) then the metonymical devices and artifacts are part of the cultural knowledge which is organised into categories. The analysis of some of these categories shows that they are arbitrary and therefore changeable, although they might appear self-evident and natural. As Townley (1994) points out: (...) “Foucault’s work suggests that we question our taken-for-granted assumptions. From it we learn that self-evidencies are not a tranquil locus on the basis of which other questions may be posed, but they themselves pose a whole cluster of questions.” (Foucault 1972: 26, in Townley). Analysis is a process of demolishing and reorganizing (Townley, pp. 4-5).

### **6.5. Metonymies and Metaphors of Competition**

Organisational tropes have been theorised as occurring in spoken conversations and organisational talk, as well as being reified and manifested in material artifact(s) (texts, objects), which were examined in the same way as the spoken word. In order to elaborate on the previous analysis a discourse analysis contextualises talk, texts and artifact(s) in the wider discursive environment while simultaneously addressing power issues.



In chapter four it was shown that the deletion of items from a combination of items on the basis of physical or causal contiguity requires the reader/listener to make assumptions about what has been deleted. This meant that metonymies are the habitus of cultural knowledge, that, in fact, for the metonymical device to work it needs to be known by both speaker and audience: “Metonymies are necessarily conventional and as such subject to limitations and changes imposed upon it by inherited knowledge and culture.”(Bredin 1985:57).

Previously the two main sites of then SBS, Dyson and Totley Campus, have been theorised as being in strong and irreversible competition with each other, since they symbolically stand for two opposing principles. The City Centre site, where undergraduate teaching takes place is associated with the nitty-gritty reality of the machine (Morgan 1986), an underprivileged subject position of “Dyson staff”, whereas the rural campus where postgraduate programmes, research centres and the “executive group” were located is linked to the high-prestige world of the enterprise culture (Ritchie 1991) as well as to the concept of a managerial hierarchy, authority and control. These associations need to be in place if sentences such as *The Old Hall has dumped this on us; I am like you. I moved down to Dyson* are to work as sense-making mechanisms. In particular buildings emerged as important “sense-carriers” for organisational members. It is through buildings that the organisational experience is conceptualised. The meaning that is attributed to buildings derives partly from wider environmental discourses. In how far this organisational experience is constituted by

meta-organisational discursive system and practices shall be examined in the following section.

#### **6.5.1. Instances of Metonymies of Competition**

Some part of the data collection period fell within a time of change for the school as well as for the university. Some of the processes and consequences have been addressed in the previous chapters and were linked to “fading, emerging, new voices”. Furthermore, the physical changes in location became a traumatic experience in the organisation, qualifying many of the cultural expectations and boundaries, although some of the assumptions are still in use as sense-making mechanisms (*The Totley-Dyson divide will live on; Ah, you live on the fifth floor, where the gods are. - i.e. where the newly formed graduate SBS is located, fieldnotes August and September 1997*), though less explicitly so.

The new building, the Business and Information Technology Centre (from here on BITC) in the official documentation was conceptualised as a “competitive advantage”, although this association of the new building with an improved competitive position had been challenged many times (*and now this new building is supposed to be the panacea for all our ills, 7 February 1997*). The appropriation of the meaning of the new building as “competitive advantage” places it firmly in the economic discourse.



For purposes of analysis I have chosen an extract from SBS's home page (within SHU's home page), <http://www.shu.ac.uk/schools/bus/bitc/index.htm>, which specifies the purpose and meaning of the BITCentre. The text itself can be found in appendix 4. The structures of the text, in itself a metonymic device, collapsing into a total metaphor, determine the meaning of yet another metonymic artifact, viz. the new BITCentre. The purpose of which is summed up in the first paragraph: *to provide state-of-the-art services to meet the needs of the 21st century*, followed by the description of how this will be achieved, viz. its purpose-design. Clearly, no purpose-less pursuit of knowledge has informed the conception of this text and its interpretation of the building. The language of hard sale practices (e.g. the superlative constructions *the most advanced* or *outstanding*) drive text construction. In terms of text cohesion, the introductory paragraph is followed by a visual representation of the building itself (*BITC nearing completion*), followed by further textual input, which establishes why the new building is a logical and necessary step in the university's development: It builds on the proven success which has resulted in unrivalled regional reputation. Its structure and approach will result in creative solutions for its customers, hence competitive advantage. The past (proven success, regional reputation) and future (to establish a Centre of international standing) are linked via the building and its *challenge-centred approach*. The BITCentre thus becomes the necessary stepping stone for future glories. The causal relationships are linguistically expressed by linking devices in the sentences themselves (which, hence, this will) driving the text forward metonymically by forging causal linkages.

The next section describes the BITC environment in more detail as well as outlining the first and foremost client groups it will associate with: The executive seminars (aimed at leading executives of regional, national and international companies) will provide eminent speakers: *The programme will provide eminent speakers to stimulate and inform a select group of executives who will use the Centre as their Sheffield Business Club at the heart of their business network in order to develop customised creative solution: to translate creative solutions into practical actions.* The choice of adjectives such as *leading, eminent, select* as related to *the heart of business network* implies the fundamental motive of the new building: to be the life giving organ in the body of business near and far afield. Similarly, this becomes possible, because the Centre is also *at the heart of Sheffield's transport network.* It is *an ideal Centre for short stay management programmes.* The metaphors of “Centre”, “heart” express a desire of being important, of high achievement (*challenge-centred approach*) which places the text firmly in the enterprise discourse and its values of being energetic, bold, risk-taking (Keat 1991) and creative (creative implying the ability to produce applicable, practical solutions). By metonymical logic, container for contained, the inhabitants of the building are assumed to be such self-reliant entrepreneurs who work together with clients in *teams from widely different disciplines and backgrounds .. to produce original solutions.* Finally, as if to provide legitimisation to the text, the voices of clients (Case UK, Novell Inc., Chartered Institute of Management) are cited (*what some of our clients think*). This element of interdiscursivity is used as a means to provide “truth” to the



previous sections stressing SHU's strengths (flexibility, capability to deliver), with only one of the three voices mentioning *high academic and professional standards and expertise of its staff and wide range of research activities* as its strengths.

The structure of the text is as follows: Explanation of purpose, pictorial representation of building, linking of past and future purposes via the building, definition of clients, description of environment (internal and external), citation of satisfied customers.

One could argue that the text as metaphorically interpreted simply stands for "advertising" which is after all one of the most frequent uses of the Internet (Bredenberg 1995). However, a closer investigation of this text will reveal its ideological character. Several issues need to be addressed in order to do so: 1. What is in terms of the text considered to be normal? 2. Who is the author of this text? 3. Whose voices are heard and which remain unheard? 4. Finally, the image and purpose of the new building shall be compared to the experience of the people who have moved into it and who are now working in it.

### Normalisation:

The repetitive use of certain signs and associated concepts contribute to establishing these categories as normal mental schemata which structure perception and interpretation of the world. The schemata of the discussed home page are the building itself, its purposes and its clients, which are conceptualised as business

people/executives/companies. Initially, the text reveals some human agency by assuming that buildings are conceived and constructed by human agency. This is expressed in the passive voice: *The Sheffield Hallam Business and information [sic!] Technology Centre is being created... . The Centre has been purpose-designed.* These grammatical constructions cease to be used after the first paragraph, after which agency is transferred to the building itself. *The aim of the Centre is to build; the Centre will take a 'challenge-centred' approach; the BITC will work in partnership with organisations; the University is launching; the Programme will provide; The Centre will work in partnership with clients; The Centre provides the highest quality surroundings; Its proximity to theatres ... .* These noun-cum-verb constructions (i.e. metonymical noun plus metaphorical verb) have been discussed already as being intrinsically symbolic in value: Of course, the Centre does not literally work together with clients. The people in the building will work together with other people and so on. These constructions obfuscate agency, which is shifted on to the artifact. In doing so, the building takes on a new status, it becomes a “living, breathing thing”, which is attributed with the power to act. Drawing on the theorising of speech acting and actants, agents and principals, the question arises: Who is the principal, what does the building stand for. Since it is worded and described as being purpose-driven and providing competitive advantage, its hidden principal is the economic discourse and its values: market-orientation and applicability. The economic discourse is given a “voice” and agency in this home page mainly via shifting agency on to the building, which then is metaphorically speaking able to act, form partnerships, provide services and so on.



Naturally, (a) real person(s) must have written this text. When discovering this page on the Internet, I tried to find out about the authorship of this particular construct. On the home page itself authorship is established as *This page has been designed by Sheffield Business School*. As shown above, this metonymical device hides the immediate authorship, i.e. the person(s) who composed this text. Nevertheless, by analysing the verbal and textual structures of the text, the “final” authorship reveals itself. It is the “invisible hand” (Smith 1911) of the market and the economic discourse. Thus, after some failed attempts to find out the person-author (I talked to the then marketing officer only to be referred to the central marketing function to be referred back to the school, where no one knew anything), I gave up my efforts. However, I assume someone from the executive group must have been involved, since the home page is an official platform of communication, that cannot be written on or used without having formal authority. Furthermore, I assume someone involved in setting up these selective seminars might have been involved in writing this page. Nevertheless, I gave up my efforts after some time and after reflection about the principal authorship. In Foucault’s words: “What difference does it make who is speaking?” (In Lodge 1995, *What is an author?*: 210), where he shows that the idea of the author which is taken for granted as a timeless category is rather a “function of discourse”, which has changed in the course of history. Therefore it is possible to claim that the economic discourse and its enterprising cousin wrote this text. Additionally, the text is being “eternally written here and now”. (Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, in Lodge 1995: 167) , where the

readership is viewed as active participants in the production of meaning. In terms of the above interpretation this implies my active involvement in rendering the home page meaningful, as well as the active participation of the readership of this text (the thesis) in constructing meaning for itself.

Nevertheless, the home page, although open to interpretation also exercises “power”. When conceptualising and writing about power I refer to the micro-mechanisms of power as it is enacted in everyday life and how everyday life is recorded. In the writing of the home page the “recorded voices” are those associated with the economic discourse more explicitly those of “the building” and “the clients” which form the business relationship. In this case, the ability to exclude other voices from this page is an exercise of power. The description of the BITC as being exclusively concerned with *select, eminent and creative executives and business partners* is contrary to the school’s situation, which was then formed of both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, as well as collaborative ones, as well as many other “less prominent” activities. In this text the greater part of the school in terms of volume and income generation has “lost its voice”, since it is not associated with the entrepreneurial element of the home page.

Previously, I discussed issues around the dual fit of words-to-world and world-to-words, which constructs perceptions and creates reality. In one of the examples I used, the then acting Director worded the world by appointing people into positions. He could do this as the agent on behalf of the principal (university or school), which attributes



perlocutionary force to his words. It is the (human) agreement that bestows power to create reality. With regard to the home page, although immediate authorship is opaque, the power as enacted on this micro level is writing the text, which privileges certain voices over others. The wording of the world is linked to the exercise of power. If speaking or writing is creating and enacting the world, then the ability to do so at occasions where one will be heard and read is a powerful one, since an audience needs to exist in order to make the message influential. In Barthes's terms the audience is free to interpret the text (just as I interpreted the home page). However, even given the potential for infinite meanings in discourse, "there is in fact a relative paucity or rarity of what is possible to think and say at any one time." (McNay 1994: 86), since discourses function through procedures of exclusion. The excluded voices are, for example, those of the students (client is conceptualised as either corporate client or executive), be it undergraduate or postgraduate, staff, be it administrative, academic or technical. In fact, though corporate clients are important, because prestigious, they are a minority group both in terms of quantity and income generation. In this respect a small group is considered, both by the immediate and the principal author, to form an elite, which is entitled to a privileged position. At the approximate time of the writing of the text (I accessed it for the first time on 07 April 1997) this privileged position was metonymically linked to the Totley campus and is now transferred to the BITC. I rechecked the text in November 1997 and the wording had not changed. Thus, I assume the privileging of some voices over others will continue to inform the writing of texts as well as the constitution of reality.

### A New Building: The Experience

The transition from the old campuses into the new BITC building, happened in August 1997 and affected not only SBS: *The B + I TC on Arundel Gate is 6000 square metres of office and teaching space which now houses the staff of the new SBS, including staff of FSL, the staff of Business and Management and some of the research staff from Computing and Management Sciences.* (Bulletin, 13 October 1997). As such the move into a new building formed part of a wider estate strategy.

The experience of the move and the initial settling down into the new building can be ironically juxtaposed to the description of the BITCentre as a “state-of-the-art environment”. Indeed the stark contrast between the description of the building in the promotional material and the actual experience of living in it/moving into it evokes Schwartz’s (1990) metaphors of organisations as “clockworks” or as “snakepits”. The clockwork organisation is purposefully carrying out its mission with people “interacting in a mutually supportive way”(p.7). Problems are technical challenges to be resolved by skilled management. The snakepit organisation is the complete opposite: “Here, everything is always falling apart, and peoples’ main activity is to see that it doesn’t fall on them (...). Managerial problems here are experienced as intracable, and managers feel that they have done well if they are able to make it through the day” (p.8).



I returned from a three week holiday in early August, i.e. at a time when most colleagues are still on annual leave. Working conditions were difficult then, with crates having been lost, no printing, computing or photo-copying facilities or telephone lines available. This situation continued and with the advancement of teaching term and the return of more and more colleagues caused stress levels to rise. Initially, an atmosphere of near-hysteria (*this is doing my head in*), the claiming of space (*I've put my folders on the next desk as well, because I don't think it's been allocated to anyone*; fieldnotes collected in August, September and October 1997) and adjustment of working patterns could be observed. Although some overtones of disgruntled enjoyment could be observed, this occasional enjoyment gave way to genuine frustration when the effects of the sheer quantities of a pre-Dearing admission period on the undergraduate programme began to be felt and the new state-of-the-art systems collapsed. This was aggravated by freezes on vacancies, unclarity in areas of responsibility and so on. As on 5 September 1997, I recorded at a unit meeting: *It's not going to be long before we read in Network or Bulletin or whatever about the quantum leap we made with the new building. It's a fallacy. The biggest mistake ever. No, there is not a single advantage to having moved.* (Of course, on the Internet that 'quantum leap' had already been worded: from regional university to select international heart of the business community. This unintended irony - a quantum leap may very well be minuscule - provides an inadvertent critical comment on the grandeur with which the move into the new building has been recorded).

The gap between the promises that had been made (*We were promised quite a few things, voice mail, security systems, printing facilities. Now I hear senior people say, this won't happen, there will only be one printer.* Open staff meeting, BITC 7140, 10. September 1997) and the experienced reality led to the unusual use of expressives in a public setting. At the same open meeting, which was attended by the Assistant Principal: *Where does the responsibility lie? Action is needed. We need some power. Budget power even. Power to the real people even. We are fed up!*

In fact, Dyson House in the cultural understanding of the school at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy is already becoming a focus of nostalgia:

*You know the other day, I had booked one of the tiny meeting rooms in Dyson for my PPD review. And I went in the room and it was warm, there was a carpet, it was tidy and quiet. A desk, two chairs, one filing cabinet, one coat hanger. That's all it takes. I came from there (BITC) and the comparison is incredible. Just to have a bit of space, warmth and quiet! (Talk with colleague, 24 October 1997, Fieldnote).*

In the attribution of meaning to buildings, Dyson has changed from “the pits” to “a haven”, which is an interesting shift in meaning, which mainly expresses the acute dissatisfaction with the current status quo (Gabriel 1993). The geographical changes, which include the interior design of the building (i.e. finding out about the location, codes of photocopy machines, printing facilities, the location of colleagues and how to contact them) formed major effort-consuming activities in the first weeks. The known “ways of doing things” had been upset and “other ways” needed to be established: *Well, I used to know whom to talk to get something done. I know we've never really*



*been efficient, but at least you got things done through personal contacts. Now that's gone as well!* (Fieldnotes 23 October 1997).

Very few positive comments have been recorded. In the fieldnote I wrote on 30 October 1997 as a general observation: *general misery, chaos, conflict ... though I have enjoyed more social lunch breaks and drinks than ever before*. This experience is shared by many colleagues and was made explicit at the quoted open meeting where a colleague said - to applause : *In many respects it is easier now to talk, share ideas and sort things out*. In this instance the open plan environment is welcomed as an opportunity to improve communication and performance.

### **6.5.2. Instances of Metaphors of Competition**

As was shown in chapter four metaphors pervade and structure everyday language and life. They are concepts that structure and define realities (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Ortony 1979 and 1993). Many instances of structural metaphors express culturally learned value systems, which contribute to sense-making processes. *I moved down to Dyson; promotion is first linked to moving out to Totley and then up the hill [i.e. the Old Hall]*. The structural metaphor “down”, “out” and “up” refer to the hierarchical organisation of space and attributed values. They are ingrained in (the English) language, whereas the reference to specific locations (metonymical devices) are expressing a specific organisational cultural code. In chapter four two main image metaphors were identified. These will be analysed in the following section as expressing

the reality of ‘competition’ as a fundamental ordering mechanism in the chosen setting. In addition to chapter four, this chapter shows how particularisation processes inherent in metaphor are constrained by the discursive environment within which they are constituted. Also, the “logic” of metonymies will be shown to be constituted within certain discursive parameters. Finally, issues around resistant tropes and discourses are investigated as well.

### Life is a Game

In terms of these image metaphors “Life is a Game” and “Time is Money” some questions around particularisation were left open. In one example, *You can’t just stop the game and put your hand up and shout to the referee ‘hey he’s been off side’, while the others are scoring goals. I mean, shouting to the referee won’t help*, (21 May 1996) life in an academic institutions is compared to a football (or similar) game that is conducted on a competitive basis. Following on from Ortony (1975) I showed how this comparison relies on the three theses inherent in metaphor. The compactness thesis, the inexpressibility thesis and the vividness thesis. They constitute metaphorical functioning in so far as a tricky organisational relationship (Centre - periphery) is neatly, expressively and lively described. I also showed how the particularisation process, i.e. the “process of filling in the details between the linguistic signposts present in the message” (p.47) enables language comprehension in so far as all of the attendees understood competitive games as well as the relationship at question to successfully communicate with each other. The employed metaphor both activated shared



understanding, but it also constrained understanding, in so far as the competitive game analogy does not allow for non-competitive, playful problem definition and solution. After the meeting I discussed the proceedings with a friend/colleague. Our particularisation of the metaphor was as follows: *It's funny, but when we play football, it's not really about scoring at all. I mean, can you actually remember who won last week? It's just brilliant if it is a beautiful game.* (21 May 1996). This particularisation process is based on a purposeless pursuit of a physically and aesthetically pleasing experience, but it remained inactivated within the context of the meeting. The reason for this is that within this context the particularisation based on 'purposelessness', 'aesthetics', 'well-being', would not have "made sense", because underlying this (and most other meetings) are the constraining forces of the economic discourse, within whose meaning system the sign "game" is linked to the signifiers "winning/losing" and "scoring goals", which are constituents of the competitive framework. The "game metaphor" is acting as a constraint to the particularisation process about the ordering of organisational relationships, here between the "Centre" and the school. Within this meaning framework it is therefore almost impossible to redefine the nature of the relationship, all one can do is *to continue with the game*. The potential existence of alternative meaning frameworks is acknowledged "outside" this particular organisational situations, where "reframing" becomes a distinct possibility. The "member resources" (Fairclough 1992), i.e. the interpretative frames, which are drawn on in the production and interpretation of meaning, theoretically allow for divergent interpretation and practices. In an organisational context, however, the "game metaphor

as competitive game” proves to be the only available interpretation, since the values associated with the “game as purposeless activity” metaphor is incompatible with the values of the economic discourse and its goal orientation. Unacknowledged internal censorship mechanisms “forbid” the activation of divergent interpretative frameworks, unless one is willing to risk looking foolish and incompetent. In this context the use of metaphor is conventional in so far as it confirms the established order of the Centre-periphery relationship and problems solutions can only be formulated “within” the existing meaning framework (Schön 1993). The purpose of this metaphor in the context of a meeting that was getting “too heated” was to provide a label for the situation and in doing so to control it (Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges 1988).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point to both the creative and constraining potential of metaphor when citing the example of an Iranian student who heard the expression “The solution to my problems” (p. 143) , which he took to be a chemical metaphor for problems as things that never quite disappear utterly and that cannot be solved once and for all, but that change forms and consistency. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) carry on from there: “ ... To live by the CHEMICAL metaphor would be to accept it as a fact that no problem ever disappears forever. Rather than direct your energies toward solving your problems once and for all, you would direct your energies toward finding out what catalysts will dissolve your most pressing problems for the longest time and without precipitating worse ones. The reappearance of problems is viewed as a natural occurrence rather than a failure on your part to find ‘the right way to solve it’.” (p.144).



In the order of this metaphor, problems have - or are - a different kind of reality. This is an example of the creative power of metaphor rather than just conceptualising a pre-existing reality (of the kind: we have to find solutions for our problems). The reason why I am referring to an example taken from a book is that I have not come across (although this might be linked to my own preconceptions) new metaphors, not even in the newcomer interviews. By a new metaphor I mean either a new particularisation process (as conducted within the ‘game - as - beauty’ football metaphor) within an established metaphor or the “invention” of a new analogy. The nearest to what could be described as an alternative frame of seeing and thinking is the works of colleagues who take a critical stance towards managerial practice and discourse in their written published works rather than in their organisational practice. In practice, I could not find instances of emergent fresh conceptual systems. Of course, one could argue that the metaphorical substitution of ‘problem’ with ‘challenge’ or ‘opportunity’ constitutes an invitation to the world a new. This meaning system of this substitution process is related to is the ‘entrepreneurial discourse’ where the existence of problems is denied.

### Time is Money

The second dominant metaphor is the “Time is Money” comparison which takes its meaning framework within the economic discourse, with time becoming a quantifiable commodity to measure work activities and rendering them amenable to budgeting, planning and investment, i.e. to managerial activities. In chapter four I pointed out that the experience of time by organisational members is different from the hour allocation

system. The quantification of time by metaphorical dint turns it into an object and thereby it becomes controllable. In practices such as workload planning, time is commodified into hours which are encaptured in the contractual exchange of labour (time) for remuneration (money), hence “Time is Money”. As a metaphorical structuring mechanism the “Time is Money” metaphor is one of the fundamental meaning frames of the economic discourse. It highlights those aspects of time that view it as a commodified resource, so that “time for work” becomes separated from “time for leisure”, “work” separate from “play”, “goal” separated from “pursuit”.

In terms of organisational practices the Time is Money metaphor translates itself into workload planning and timetabeling, in which activity is structured through time measurement. These practices express the principle of efficiency or non-idleness, since it is “forbidden to waste time, which was counted by God and paid for by men.” (Foucault 1979: 154). The modern notion of efficiency relies on a quantitative perception of temporality and its exchange in activity/production. “If time is money, time is no longer passed but spent.” (Townley 1994: 63).

In a professional context, however, groups such as academics some of whom have not worked under this discipline to this extent, are under increasing pressure to provide an adequate return on time. Responses have been mixed. In some cases a withdrawal of goodwill (*what I used to do for free, I am now claiming overtime for*, Interview with retired colleague), in other cases the introduction of clearer employment conditions



made the contractual arrangement more visible and this was welcomed: *It's much clearer now. You can now actually say 'Hey, I'm over hours. You can't make me do this. Before the new contract - you might not even remember these times, Susanne - you couldn't really say that.* Interview with retired colleague, 9 July 1996). In this instance the introduction of the discipline, i.e. techniques designed to observe, monitor and control behaviour (Foucault 1977) empowers the individual subject to refuse instructions. Power is positive and creative in so far as it makes “sayable” what could not be said before. As I have pointed out earlier, the notion of power as the brute exercise of force is inappropriate for the analysis of a complex, rich professional environment. In Foucault's conception power is ubiquitous and diffuse, but always present. As Fraser (1989) states: “It shows that power is as present in the most apparently trivial details and relations of everyday life as it is in corporate suites, industrial assembly lines, parliamentary chambers, and military installations.” (p.26) This conception of power shifts the focus of analysis from ‘Who whom’ to ‘How’. Therefore, the metaphor “Time is Money” can be described as “powerful”, because it informs organisational disciplines. However, it also enables subjects to resist, and to use its practices in the spirit of discretion in given situations. In doing so, subjects establish themselves, albeit precariously, as free subjects exercising autonomy. On the other hand, the metaphor's emphasis on efficiency and measurable performance outcomes, constrains knowledge and what is sayable in so far as many parts of the professional experience remain uncaptured. One such example would be the exercise of emotional labour. At a meeting of the executive group (15 April 1997) the Head of



Undergraduate Programmes, in charge of setting up a pastoral and administrative support system for first year students, articulated the difficulties she had in setting up the system as *No one wants to hold the sweaty hand of first year students. People want to do sexy things, like research or course management.* The ‘sweaty hand’ comparison relates this kind of work to dealing and caring for the problems of students. It describes pastoral, caring activity and the willingness to do so. However, in the organisational ranking of ‘worthwhile’ activities, research and course management are seen as privileged activities, which carry more prestige and are more likely to be linked to promotion opportunities. The hierarchy of work practices is expressed in the articulation and exercise of pastoral care and skills as being linked to *sweaty hand(s)*, the holding of which is an unpleasurable experience. As opposed to the pleasures to be gained by ‘having sex’ (*doing sexy things*) such as course management and research. The knowledge and skills needed to exercise pastoral care and the required emotional labour remained mainly mute. As Dex (1985) comments: “The nature of this skill is not clearly defined, but it is integrally bound up with the sexual division of labour.” The emotional labour is either ignored or the skills associated with it are difficult to articulate, although they form an integral and important part of a lecturer’s work. Townley quotes an example of a female doctor (James 1989) who could not define the skills she uses with patients, which were vital to her work, but indescribable (i.e. unsayable) within the dominant medical phraseology (or discourse). “In practice what this means is that the skills involved are not recognised as skills, either by employers or society or often women themselves.” (James 1989: 30). Although this thesis does not explicitly concern



itself with stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity and how they guide and shape perception, instances confirming James's theorising have been found. This instance of *sweaty hands* versus *doing sexy things* draws on two metaphorical images: Firstly those of the parent (mother)/child relationship and secondly on the adult activities. The latter one being the privileged metaphor in the ordering of the world.

### **6.6. Discourses, Power and Resistance**

In the first part of this section metonymical texts (the home page) and artifact(s) were discussed with the conclusion that both were constituted within the economic discourse. In particular, the BITCentre was elevated within the meaning framework of this discourse to take on agency on behalf of the economic/entrepreneurial principal. The voice of this text was the market and enterprise discourse, which privileges some actants over others. The power element was discussed as the ability to word the world and present it as such to the outside world while excluding some voices from the representative act.

Similarly, with regard to metaphorical constructions, particularisation processes were shown to be informed by the economic discourse, whose logic is seen to be inescapable. Some examples were given to demonstrate that metaphorical constructions carry in them - at least theoretically - the potential for genuine reframing and alternative meaning systems. Therefore, the subject is not a passive slave to the power of the "normal" discourse, whose effectiveness lies in its invisibility. The relationships of

power are dialectical, so that they can be reformulated and changed, although the hegemony of prevailing discourses is difficult to break, because the invisible normalisation strategies bestow them with the status of “truth”. However, divergent meaning attribution exists and in the next section instances of resistance and deviant practice shall be explored.

### Instances of Resistance

Issues around power have been addressed in so far as the exercise of voice has been linked to the position of individuals or groups as speaking/acting objects, which are - or are not - involved in the creation of the social world. Secondly, issues around privileging certain meaning categories/discourses over others were conceived as representative of powerful meta-organisational discourses.

In the spirit of this thesis which is concerned with exploring the everyday realities of a particular organisation, power is not so much viewed as a direct form of insidious repression, but as operating (i.e. a process!) through less visible strategies of normalisation. Examples of how normalisation works were given.

However, it would be misleading to assume that “some” engage in deliberate strategies of normalisation while “others” are passive malleable objects of these strategies. The practice of power is less conspirational and more complex, diffuse even and subjects are simultaneously using discursive practices and in doing so shaping, possibly even



changing discursive power relations. Power in operation generates a multiplicity of effects. The analysis of the “microphysics of power” (McNay 1994: 91) concerns itself with *The Practice of Everyday Life* (de Certeau 1984) to examine practices that usually remain invisible.

Instances of resistance and “recalcitrance” (McNay 1994:91) have already been discussed as the voice of irony (recalcitrance being linked to the more outspoken sarcasm), since their significance lies in bringing power relations to the fore. With regard to discussing instances of resistance, they are not seen as an annoying obstacle in the path of the exercise of power (an approach espoused by most textbooks of management, resulting in prescriptive lists on how to manage “resistance to change”), but as being as diffuse and ubiquitous, as relational as power itself. In fact, the examples that will be discussed will show that power and resistance form one “Gestalt”. A point supported by Nevis (1987): “The expression of any indication of opposition of something is as much a statement of integrity of the person(s) expressing it, as is the manifestation of nonoppositional behaviour” (p.144).

For the purpose of this analysis, some examples that were used in previous chapters shall be re-examined and some further ones will be introduced.

Previously, in chapters four and five, I have quoted the following incident taken from an appointment day: *Everyone in the school is a leader. [Facetiously] We have course leaders. Susanne over there is a course leader. There are subject leaders. Bert is a*

*subject leader, so if Susanne wants some German for her course, she will talk to Bert. - Not that this has got anything to do with German.* The application of non-verbal signs (wriggling of fingers to put the sign leader into quotation marks) and intonation resulted in ironisation of the notion of leadership and the internal market mechanism: “The intended meaning contradicts customary meaning.” (Brown 1977). The customary meaning being the one attributed to the economic discourse and its assumptions about the superiority of market processes as ordering mechanisms. In chapter five this example was re-used and its interpretation was broadened as to include the concepts of “dissenting voice”. Finally, this instance will now be framed as evoking two different discourses, viz. the voice of the economic discourse and the voice of the academic discourse, which are juxtaposed against each other. This is an instance of “multivoicedness” (Wertsch 1991) or multi-discoursedness and demonstrates how discourses may come in contact, interanimate and infiltrate each other. Firstly, an opinion about the inappropriateness of the mechanisms of the economic discourse is expressed. They commodify “German” by the buying and selling transactions between course and subject leaders. Secondly, it is pointed out that these transactions remain unrelated to German as an academic discipline, the meaning of which is constituted within the academic discourse (*not that this has got anything to do with German*). The speaker dissociates himself from the transactions of buying and selling, which are bestowed with scorn. The speaking subject in this example has access to more than one discourse and actively resists the economic discourse by using the trope irony. The market mechanism is not an appropriate tool to deal with the academic subject (*Not*



*that this has got anything to do with German*) and remains aloof from the content of the subject: Irony uses the same language and concepts. Having shown how intrinsically language and acting are interlinked, I shall venture that the potential to enact change is similarly intrinsically linked to using a different language. Irony does not “do” this. However, referring back to Nevis’s (1987) conceptualisation of resistance, the use of the ironic trope is then not necessarily exclusively an act of defiance, it is also an act of exercising integrity with regard to the subject’s understanding of itself and its academic discipline. The act of linguistic resistance, i.e. the activation of the trope irony, can then be viewed as a positive, possibly a liberating instance of the exercise of self-assertion in which the exercise of power and the exercise of resistance form one “Gestalt”. Thus, “irony” has more positive qualities than previously conceded in so far as it is an act of preserving the subject’s integrity. As such irony moderates the discourses that meet in it by indirectly changing the taken-for-granted meaning.

A similar example of resistance has been discussed twice. It was taken from a meeting of the executive group when the notion of “what is a professor” was discussed in order to demonstrate the multiplicity of meaning and in chapter five, the consequences of taking on particular meaning positions were discussed. The person positioning himself in the academic discourse (What do professors do - *They THINK* in an environment similar to the one in the old universities) had left - or been made to leave - this particular group. The person positioning himself explicitly in the economic discourse (wanting to control the process of selecting and appointing professors as well as the people who

have aspirations to it) continues to occupy a position of influence in the new school.

This instance is an example of power relationships, in which two discourses meet. One speaker, the one who took meaning from the economic discourse, directly challenged the other speaker (*you are putting forward a traditional notion of professor*) -

‘traditional’ in the economic discourse is antithetical to the future-oriented value of achievement. In this instance discourses meet in a more confrontational way as opposed principles represented by two senior member of staff. In terms of the influence that can be exercised by being part of senior groups of decision makers (i.e. by exercising voice) the representative of the economic discourse in terms of his position survived the upheaval of the transformation process in the school and university. However, this does not imply the end of “resistance”, but simply modifies where it is executed.

Assessing this situation it seems to me symbolic for the dilemma of the Business School that two of its most experienced and senior members remain in a position of unreconciled dichotomy rather than attempting to jointly explore different forms of discourse that more accurately reflect their own history and development. The alternatives that are offered are either “to ape” the traditional model or to subscribe to an entrepreneurial mode of existence. Writers such as van Ginkel (1995), Thorne (1996) and Torbert (1991) suggest different strategies of envisaging the future, which Thorne encapsulates in the voice metaphor and the danger for new universities to remain in a position of “mutedness” (p.25).



Instances of ‘recalcitrance’ may point to the exercise of resistance (however, in their “blokishness” they often seemed to me to be part of superficial levelling exercises) and therefore to the existence of power relationships. Quite often, these relations are linked to the perceived dominance of the administrators or the “Centre” over processes regarding the timing and operations of events such as examinations scheduling, marking time, the setting of rules and regulations for assessment, the setting of budgeting rules and targets. These procedures are felt to be *imposed without any academic rationale* (Fieldnote, 14 October 1996) leading to the refusal to cooperate as an expression of non-compliance and non-acceptance: *I don't care that the call for exam papers came out already. We are teaching a newly validated programme and need to develop a feel for how it works before we can set questions. Let them wait for a change. Let us set the rules for a change, according to what makes sense for us and the students.* (Unit meeting, fieldnotes, 14 October 1996).

In the everyday practice of refusal to accept the tightening time schedule of setting, processing and marking examinations is an exercise of power by a “free” subject, who will insist on “doing her own thing”.

Goffman (1961) shows how individuals leading regimented lives in total institutions (prisons, asylums, the military) create niches for themselves to protect and preserve their “naked self”. Examples of these ways of preserving selfhood can take the form of only seemingly trivial acts. One might argue that the university environment does not

constitute a total institution, although comments about being or feeling regimented are manifold and mainly captured in machine metaphors (Morgan 1986) and feeling out of control. In Goffman's frame, the acts of defiance confirm the autonomy of the "naked self". However, ironically the acts and talk of defiance in turn inform and confirm the picture of some staff as behaving like *petulant teenagers* (Fieldnote, unit leader, 13 November 1997) in need of more control.

In how far these expressives of resistance and "recalcitrance" amount to significant resistance is debatable. If power and power relations are diffused, linked to micro-practices, the exercise of resistance is diffused as well. In terms of a critique of this understanding of power and how it works one might ask "so how does change occur?". Is the above quotation and similar instances an example of serious resistance or the mere manifestations of a verbose pseudo-individuality? Is serious resistance from within the system possible at all or does "exit" beckon? *I am not staying. I am taking SPEES. I don't want to do the fighting to get things done. It will be like wading through porridge - or cement. John tried to get a letter done via support staff. "We don't do letters". He got it done - finally - as a personal favour! If that's how they're going to treat us, it's like an insurance office, one desk next to the other, not like professionals.* (Fieldnote, 26. August 1997). The practice of everyday operations is likened to an act of aggression (fighting) which is further linked to *wading through porridge* or as aggravated *through cement*. Both substances, be it porridge or cement, are of an all-embracing, sticky nature that make progress difficult, if not impossible. Both share everyday functionality



(one as a nutrient, ones as a building component), but in a world turned upside down (*they are going to treat us ... not like professionals*) the substances take on a new meaning and turn into viscous mass. The refusal by support staff *to do letters* symbolises to the speaker a contemptuous act, which degrades professionals (academics) to insurance staff. The outlay of the office constitutes and confirms (*like an insurance office*) this reality, which is in the speaker's mind a travesty of "the normal order of things". In order to get things done one has to depend on previously established relationships (*personal favours*) rather than on one's "natural" position in the organisational order. By the same token one could argue that upsetting the "natural order" (Foucault 1970) in which academics are assumed to be rightfully privileged over administrators is an important function of challenging the established status quo.

Other instances suggest that 'meaning creation' does not follow the norms of the economic discourse and that individuals create personal niches in how they attribute meaning to their organisational life and practice. In an example I used previously a colleague draws meaning from transformational teaching experiences (though painfully compared to his current reality), others insist on chaos and disorder *on my desk* (Fieldnote, 20 November 1997), explicitly refusing to follow the clear-desk policy of the university; others report on implanting the seeds of critical thinking into students as *the teacher's tool to change the world. No one controls what I am doing in the classroom.* (Fieldnote, pub, 24 October 1997). Although this last statement is debatable, since the setting of standardised curricula, quality control mechanisms, the "student"

voice, who quite often demands more standardisation (Darwin, 1996) extend the axis of control to reach into the classroom itself. Also, there is some danger in romanticising existing daily practice as acts of resistance: *I quite like playing the maverick to Rosie's bureaucrat*. (Fieldnote, pub, 24 October 1997).

Nevertheless, the evocation of 'game' as an aesthetic experience, although not activated within the context of the meeting, points to the possibilities of what de Certeau (1984) in his *The Practice of Everyday Life* describes as how individuals in a rationalised and administered society make miniscule transformations of the dominant cultural imperative. These transformations can be aligned to processes of resignification which provide an aesthetic perspective and in doing so release metaphor's emancipatory potential.

Yet another example involved myself, my (then) line manager and the acting Director of the school and concerned my progression through a salary bar. It involved two interviews, the results of which were recorded and sent to the central Human Resource Department. This discipline of control and information gathering was turned to my advantage in so far as *this is recorded now. All you did in the previous two years, publications, PhD, course management and teaching. Whenever we need it, it's there now*. (About June 1997, line manager). In this instance the documentation might still act as part of the process of my objectification in so far as the recording of knowledge is not a neutral process and "real lives are converted into case notes", (Burrell 1988: 226).



Written documentation is final and often irreversible. The very act of recording implies a control effect. However, the key to understanding this particular instance lies in the words: It is not a neutral process; because it is not neutral, subjects are free to exercise their discretion when engaging in organisational practice such as interviewing. The interviews were based, at least in my perception, on good will and collegiality: *We will make the system work for you.* (Line manager).

Regardless of the efforts to make the system work for the individual, it is noteworthy that within different schools of the university different practices are exercised. A phone call to a colleague and friend in a similar position of being ‘between bars’ confirmed that she was not invited to attend two assessment interviews. Her progress was automatic; she simply received a letter confirming her progression through the bar. This provides some evidence that the exercise of power relationships is local.

The examination of these microstrategies of talk and action focus on the specific manifestations of power and resistance. All instances and examples contain an element of ambiguity, where the lines between power and resistance, the subject and the object, autonomy and control, blur. The study of everyday language and practice provides some evidence of the exercise of autonomy. This can be confirmed by a quick glance at the literature, where studies conducted by Townley (1997) and Willmott (1995) point to the institutionalisation of resistance, in which universities are actively involved in adjusting and changing some of the practices that were “imposed” on them.

## 6.7 . Summary and Discussion

In this chapter a “linguistically driven” analysis of organisational talk and other sign systems was conducted. Partly, the approach was informed by Fairclough’s “textually driven discourse analysis” (TODA), partly by my own findings about the nature and role of organisational tropes provided the organising framework. In this chapter a stage has been reached, where the organising framework is no longer purely derived from already existing linguistic theories, but has emerged from the theorising and reflecting within this thesis. The intention of this chapter was to embed organisational talk and artifact(s) in the wider environmental discourses as well as to investigate issues around power and resistance, which had not been fully addressed in the previous chapters.

The conceptual framework about discourses, power and knowledge was based on some of Foucault’s writings, though my stance of writing and thinking is less deterministic in outlook.

In particular, power and resistance emerged as important concepts that guide and structure everyday practice within the discourses that prevail in the HE environment. These were established as the dichotomy of “academic” and “economic” discourses. The focus on a microlevel of analysis did sustain the existence of discourses and their active employment, be it deliberate or unintentional, by organisational members. However, it did not bear out the crude polarisation of “academic” versus “economic” discourse as mutually exclusive meaning systems. Instead, discursive practices overlapped, informed and moderated each other.



Power was conceptualised as being situated in the “interstices of power relations, at the level of individuals’ daily practices.” (McNay 1994: 7) rather than the clear-cut exercise of homogeneous domination of one individual over the other or one group over another. Secondly, resistance together with power formed one “Gestalt”, so that individual subjects construct counter-hegemonial forms of identity for themselves.

Metonymical-cum-metaphorical (noun plus verb) constructions were shown to reify organisational processes and in doing so rendered them objects to control. However, in daily practice, absolute control cannot be exercised and counter-tactics are developed by organisational members.

Hegemonial and integrating mechanisms were activated to manufacture consent. This was achieved by the use of the “polarised us and them” (van Dijk 1997: 32) pronouns, i.e. via the metaphorical substitution process. Furthermore, the evocation of the metonymical arrangement of the School and how it was challenged (by moving *down to Dyson*) was used to establish alliances and produce consent. It was shown in how far hegemonial discourse is less explicit in terms of its ideological intent, but that individuals are evoking the wider economic discourses, which they cannot escape.

Referring to the strategies of normalisation newcomer data was investigated to show how meaning systems can be adjusted and learned and then begin to inform

organisational practices. This was extended to include the anticipatory socialisation of potential students when reading the course brochure, which was analysed as to show the intent of re-and overwording as normalisation processes in an overall metonymic text (the brochure).

Furthermore, metonymical ordering mechanisms produce categories of meaning within which colleagues constitute themselves as individual subjects, although the meaning systems themselves are linked to environmental discourses. Three categories of “academic” were established which were driven from different discursive positions. These positions are not be seen as fixed, unchangeable categories, instead they overlap and inform each other.

Metonymical and metaphorical devices were further explored within the analysis of one particular text (in itself a metonymical device) concerning itself with one particular building (the second metonymical device). This text was clearly positioned within an unitary economic discourse, privileging its meaning system over any other alternative via the strategies of normalisation, which included bestowing agency on the metonymic building, whose principal was shown to be the economic discourse. Also, the exclusion of other “voices” formed part of the privileging process.

Metaphors, mainly the image metaphors “Life is a Game” and “Time is Money” were investigated and placed in their wider meaning system. It was shown that several particularisation processes exist, but that the discursive setting constrains the



particularisation process as to allow only limited interpretations of metaphorical constructions. Metaphor's constraining as well as emancipatory potential was discussed. The discussion then focused on the "Time is Money" metaphor and how it informs organisational practices.

Finally, the last section focused on the dialectics of "power" and "resistance" and addressed issues around in how far individual subjects are either passively shaped or actively shaping discursive practices. The usage of the trope irony was revisited and the interpretation expanded as to include the protection of a subject's integrity. Irony may moderate the discourses that meet in it by indirectly changing the taken-for-granted meanings.

Several examples were investigated to shed light on how subjects are passively formed as well as actively shaping their positions within their discursive environment. Its comprehension as changing and complex suggests that organisational practices are similarly inchoate and ambiguous. Also, the two discourses I focused on in my analysis are by no means the only ones. I have briefly mentioned a "gender discourse"; other discourses (e.g. discourse of age, position, race etc.) are conceivable although they have not informed this analysis. Taking the whole discursive environment into account, would render the analysis much more complex - however, how could one ever claim to understand/analysis all shades and nuances of the discursive environment? The first preamble to this would be an ability to "see" everything that exists.

To sum up, the major findings are:

1. Metaphor and metonymy are informed by wider environmental discourses. Meaning derives not exclusively from the organisational context or individual use of language/sign system, but is moderated by the environmental meaning systems.
2. Metaphors and metonymies are used in the production of consent and normalisation strategies.
3. Metaphors contain both constraining and liberating potential.
4. Irony functions both as a tool of wit and critique, but it also preserves integrity and moderates meaning.
5. Power and resistance as enacted in talk and action and form one “Gestalt”.
6. Subject are both constituted by and constituting the discursive environment.

In the next chapter, all findings of the thesis shall be summarised and discussed. The role of language and other signs systems in sense-making processes shall be explored in detail.



## **Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion**

At the beginning of this chapter the experienced “linguistic confusion” is addressed and whether it has been resolved within the parameters of this project. This is followed by a summary and discussion of the major findings of chapters four, five and six. Based on this discussion I suggest a “tropological approach” to the analysis of meaning creation and sense making processes in organisational settings. This approach represents the contribution of this thesis to the field of organisation theory.

Issues arising from the espoused paradigmatic position (interpretive) while working within organising frameworks derived from different traditions will be discussed as well as “writing ethnographic texts”.

The thesis will conclude as it began on a personal note, which will return to the journey metaphor in order to evaluate where to the process of travelling has led.

### **7.1. The Resolution of Confusion**

This thesis started with the narrating of a personal experience, which was described as “linguistic confusion”, a deeply felt bewilderment. This new situation was characterised by unfamiliar terminology, data, signals and symbols, which I experienced as impossible to decode because relational codes between signs were not known at the time of the entry experience (Evered 1983). The intensity of this experience provided the initial motivation to resolve this state of mind and in doing so make understanding possible. The first and strongest linguistic confusion was related to particular signs such as “student”, “customer”, “course”, “product”, “portfolio of products”, “internal market” and so on. Naturally, over time connotative meaning emerged. Nevertheless, the experience of having felt so strongly about this confusion, still puzzled me at the out-set of this thesis.

The processes I discovered during the research show that to switch between two signs is a metaphoric substitution process, which connects different meaning domains. These, in



turn, are related to different value systems, which, if turned upside-down, will not only cause bewilderment, but also “emotional resistance”. In my understanding at the time of socialisation I was unable to follow the substitution process, because signs such as “customer” were in my mind firmly connoted with the world of commerce - a world unrelated and aloof from the world and meaning systems of education. The learning process involved the loosening of the connotative links between signs and what they mean, so that new connections could be forged. Furthermore, as shown in the research, talk, i.e. using signs, is linked to action. To engage in metaphorical substitution processes is to engage in different organisational practices. Thus the meaning of signs is linked to action, which I experienced at the time as confusing (e.g. quality audits). Also, some of the organisational activities such as teaching on MBA courses were viewed as “better” than other activities such as teaching languages on undergraduate programmes. Even colleagues who rejected this order always made a point of mentioning their engagement with these “higher” activities (*I can't make the placement meeting tomorrow. I am teaching the MBA-lot, from memory*).

This privileging of activities derives from the wider meaning system in which organisational meaning systems are embedded. These meaning systems provide a discursive environment that is performed in everyday talk. The dialectics between talk, meaning and practice seem evident now, they were not so obvious then. Comments such as the above express a ‘hierarchy’ of order in which organisational activities are ‘ranked’ in a ‘meaningful’ way, i.e. the ‘highest’ activity comprised postgraduate work



with practising managers and consultancy activities; the ‘lower’ activities involved language work on undergraduate or diploma programmes. As Hawkes (1972) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have shown, these ordering systems are not ‘neutral’, but they express a cultural value system which determines cultural understanding.

In sum, my confusion was caused by my unfamiliarity with some metaphorical substitution processes as linked to organisational practices and wider environmental discourses. I could not follow the metaphorical process, because in my meaning system the tension between “customer” and “student” was too strong to allow for the two signs to be in a metaphorical relationship.

Finally, after some years as a member of staff I was appointed as a postgraduate course leader, which involved a physical relocation from Dyson to Totley (Ballard Block). The learning processes with regard to understanding and practising the duties of a course leader were easier by then. However, the impact of my move to Totley on colleagues was surprising. To me the move implied “betterment” in so far as it signalled the beginning of my involvement in the postgraduate area and the carrying of greater responsibilities. I was unaware of the profound symbolic meaning the change implied for colleagues. Of course, one could argue that since I myself associated “betterment” with the move (implying no such “betterment” for those “left behind in Dyson”), I should not have been quite as amazed by some of the reactions my relocation provoked. Nevertheless, maybe naively, I was unprepared for the intensity of some of the

comments that were made. Partly, the sometimes quite hostile comments by “Dyson House colleagues” can be explained with the symbolic meaning of the school’s metonymical arrangement and the implications of becoming associated with a different part of these arrangements. In this respect the analysis of metonymical ordering mechanisms, in particular geographical arrangements and buildings, have opened my eyes to understand the symbolic weight attached to material artifact(s). In this regard, the second period of puzzlement has been successfully resolved, too. From a personal point of view the objective has been achieved in so far as a catharsis effect has taken place and tension has been resolved and understanding emerged. However, in how far does this thesis constitute a contribution of knowledge to organisation studies?

## **7.2. Summary and Discussion**

Departing from the application of a structuralist framework, the tropes metonymy and metaphor emerged as important sense making mechanisms in so far as meaning was created within the dialectics of the relationships between signs. Also, they were shown to be the habitus of collective meaning, i.e. cultural knowledge. In a structuralist approach meaning is systemic in so far as the signs of the meaning system make sense only if they are in a clearly defined relationship of either binary or multiple opposition. If this clear distinction between signs cannot be established easily, the meaning of signs becomes opaque and subject of debates (as shown in the sign professor) as to (re) establish more permanent boundaries and eradicate nontranslucency. As such, the meaning system is not fixed and unchangeable.



Within the structuralist frame, meaning is expressed via the relationship within as well as between signs. The latter is either metaphorical or metonymical in character.

Metonymies, the figure of speech resulting from the principle of either physical or causal contiguity of signs, was shown to be a major sense-making mechanism in the organisational setting. As the habitus of cultural knowledge, be it in the form of “logical”, causal connections, of organisational stories, of artifacts and geographical arrangements as well as physical buildings, it draws on collectively shared default assumptions, which can be organisation-specific or form part of a much wider environment-specific framework (e.g. commercial culture, enterprise culture). The processes of combination and deletion on the basis of physical or causal contiguity are activated in the usage of the trope metonymy in such a way that only socialised members of the organisational/cultural environment will be able to decode the figure of speech as to create “meaningful” interpretation. Metonymies take a multitude of forms in which culturally learned organising mechanisms are expressed. Many metonymies are organisation-specific. Even if the principles of organising are critically queried (e.g. my divergent interpretation of Martha’s story; uses of irony and sarcasm), the metonymic figure nevertheless fulfils its function, which is to ensure communication that is meaningful in so far as it is understood by organisational members, though individual interpretation may vary: The trope makes sense, though no agreement of meaning might ever be achieved. Changes in metonymical arrangements (e.g. the move into the new building, new structures) are experienced as traumatic, because they

impact on the collectively shared understanding of organisational ordering and sense-making systems.

Similarly, metaphors were shown to constitute and express a shared value system, with structural metaphors forming the basic conceptual level. The two dominant image metaphors I found (Time is Money; Life is a Game) draw on the meaning and value system of a wider commercial and competitive culture. The translation quality inherent in metaphorical figures enables meaning to be transferred from one domain (business, commerce, competitive leisure activity) to another (education, research, organisational processes) to establish meaningful interpretation and inform the organisation of work processes. The shift of meaning between two signifiers of previously unrelated domains explains metaphor's emancipatory potential, the invitation to see the world anew.

However, metaphors, once they have become established as normal ways of seeing the world can turn "ideological" and constrain creativity in so far as established particularisation process come to be seen as "natural". The metaphors I found were specific to a wider cultural environment. However, how they informed practice bore organisation-specific characteristics, i.e. the workload system of the school has some intricacy that is 'typical' of the school. Organisational members "resist" the dominant metaphors by applying the ironic trope or expressing uneasiness with the prevalent application of (business, competitive) metaphors to educational settings. The tension inherent in every metaphor is in this instance experienced as too strong.

No new metaphorical explorations of organisational life emerged during my research. The conceptualisation of "game" as "beautiful" or "satisfying" (as opposed to



“winning/losing”) provided some evidence that the established mould of translating meaning between domains may be broken. However, in terms of the collective organisational meaning the divergent particularisation process (Ortony 1975) remained mute. It was only expressed amongst a collective of friends after the cited meeting, i.e. in a private enclave (Cohen and Taylor 1992).

Finally, the interplay of metaphor and metonymy was theorised as resulting in organisational symbolism which is created in the processes of simultaneous interplay of combination and deletion on the basis of physical or causal contiguity (metonymic principle) which, together with processes of arranging and translating (metaphoric principle) result in the experience of organisations as symbolic. Default assumptions are activated in both figures, which renders the process intrinsically collective. Because of the metaphorical content of organisational symbols, they can be particularised, i.e. interpreted in various ways so that they come to carry different meanings for different organisational members (Morgan, Frost and Pondy 1983). The building “the Old Hall” symbolises a managerial hierarchy to some, but it may very well symbolise ‘achievement’, or ‘wisdom’ for others. However, I should like to argue that for the symbol to work when used in communication, sufficient common ground needs to be shared for this cultural device to facilitate communication. Albeit, no claims about symbols as unambiguous constructs reflecting organisational process (Calas and Smircich 1987) can be made on the evidence of this thesis.

The next chapter expanded on these findings in so far as the performative value of language (speech, but also texts), including figurative language, was investigated within the organising framework of speech act theory and pragmatics. Meaning was shown to emerge in a context-of-use, which comprised the past, present and future, various locations, the speech actors themselves as well as their mutual relationships. The limits of knowledge and interpretation were addressed when analysing more complex situations or conversational exchanges.

Causal contiguities (i.e. metonymies) as the habitus of cultural assumptions were investigated as they occurred in talk and texts. These cultural shifts between signs did not remain undisputed and their validity was challenged either as a misplaced causal shift or as a debatable interpretation of the past. Meaning in these instances was not simply subscribed to, but rejected or reinterpreted: As Czarniawska-Joerges (1988) puts it: “The rest talks back!”. Höpfl (1992) points out that the extent to which meaning can be managed by ‘leaders’ in an unproblematic way is doubtful. “[Anyone who has witnessed ... will be aware of ] the wide discrepancy between the apparent allegiance of the conference room or auditorium and the bar-room dissension which often follows.” (p.26). The (re) interpretation happened by applying metaphorical figures of speech. However, the metonymical devices were still “understood”, because they are collective in character, but they are not necessarily experienced as “meaningful” or “just” by organisational members. Also, meaning derived for organisational members only if words were linked to action, without which words were metaphorically described as *paper tigers*.



In one instance the activated default assumptions were not decoded by parts of the audience (*I don't know what you mean by J4*), leading to a break down in communication. Both persons involved in this exchange are long-serving members of the school, though involved in activities so different as to be insufficient to generate enough default “common ground” as to facilitate understanding, let alone shared meaning. This instance provides additional evidence that organisations comprise of several meaning systems: “Organizing is embedded in a cultural context, from which certain traits are adopted by certain groups. This leads to clashes and conflicts. The notion of a uniformly shared organizational culture (...) seems to receive neither theoretical nor empirical support, only normative.” (Czarniawska-Joerges 1992: 185). However, instances of stories pointed to the existence of shared meaning. In the analysis of Claude's story (about students' claims and complaints) the bi-directional fit of words was investigated in so far as the stories symbolised a certain order of the organisational world, which resulted in organisational action and adaptation of behaviour. Although I do not “share the symbolic meaning” of these stories as living in such a totalitarian world suppressing the individual, I “do understand what Claude meant”, i.e. “sharing meaning” and “understanding meaning” are two different processes. Claude constitutes himself as a subject (Gabriel 1995: 481) based on his experience. Gabriel (1991, 1995) argues that the significance of stories does not derive from the extent to which they ‘accurately’ report events, but it derives from their symbolic significance, i.e. how these “events are seen to be infused with meaning.” (Cohen and Musson 1996: 146). In terms

of stories as metonymical devices, their symbolic significance derives from their 'slice of life' character, which lends itself to translating the disperse event into cohesive meaning. As all metonymies, stories have to entail a minimum common ground to work as sense-making devices.

The question of how organisations come to enter the field of discourse was explored via the metaphor of voice. Abstract principals such as "the school", "the university", but also "democracy", "informal leadership" etc. find their agency in individual actors, who in turn transcend their finite individuality into a lasting higher collective principal. The voice metaphor was theorised from different perspectives (institutional voice, new voice, dissenting voice, fading and fluctuating voices, having no voice). Meaning derives from enacting a collective principal. This principal does not have to be the most "powerful" one in order to create meaning, but it needs to be an identifiable collective voice. Failure to enact a principal results in the experience of meaninglessness, be it as an individual or a collective. In these instances blame is allocated as expressed metaphorically ("they" etc.) or by transferring emotion (McAuley 1989) to an anonymous agency as expressed in metonymies ("the Centre", "the Old Hall"). Meaning was shown to be inchoate and in flux in so far as enacting agency is a fragile enterprise, with the authority to bespeak the world being brittle. Finally, dissenting voices express their disapproval via tropes such as irony or by evoking different principals by dint of metaphorical shifting between signifiers ("we" - "they"). The collective meaning results from being in opposition to the dominant principal. The



investigation shifted to the processes of how dominance of some voices over other voices is achieved. This part of the research process included an analysis of the discourses of the external environment.

The tactics and strategies of power, hegemony and ideology provided the thematic guide for this analysis, which was positioned in a critical tradition (Fairclough 1989, 1992). Creating consensus and common-sensical meaning are achieved via the simultaneous evocation of organisational metaphors (“down to Dyson”) and metonymy (“Dyson”) to result in symbolic action with the intent to forge alliances and establish a shared, common-sensical meaning system. The establishment of “normality” to organisational processes and conduct is achieved through the tactics of information overload, rewording, a metaphorically driven substitution processes and overwording, emphasising ideologically significant meaning relationships. The “power” of these tactics lies in the “hiddenness” of their assumptions, thus bestowing the status of “normality” on related practices. These hidden assumptions were shown to be linked to extra-organisational meaning frameworks, which were categorised as economic, enterprise and academic discourse. The consensual meaning that was aspired to was shown to be the final result of a subtle process of persuasion and performance (Höpfl 1992), manufacturing consent and ideological meaning. With regard to one particular meeting which I metaphorically framed as the emergence of a new voice, meaning was managed (Cohen and Musson 1995) and by implication the experience of ‘the others’ was framed (Höpfl 1992). The aspiring leader, the “novice masters/mistresses must

offer and sustain a vision. This is one of the most important functions of charismatic leadership: the manufacture and maintenance of meaning.” (Höpfl 1992: 29). The charismatic leader figure relies on the force of his personality (Brouissine and Guerrier 1985, in Höpfl 1992) and becomes “a potent symbol of the change process and its agency.” (McAuley 1996:226) to the extent that members do not express dissent (at least not when in a public domain). This renders the process “messianic in its thrust - that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.” (McAuley 1996:227).

One might pause and ask how far is this episode significant - rather than being a mere personal “epiphany”? Alvesson (1993) raises concerns about an indiscriminatory approach to the study of cultural processes, leading to the “problem of triviality” (p.62). Indeed, “many writers seem to be enthralled by the idea of calling activities ‘rites’ ... [which] makes the reader wonder if there are any events of importance in organizations other than rites” (p.65). I agree with Alvesson’s concern and the necessity of rigour in ethnographic studies. I hope to have achieved this rigour by having constructed an interesting interpretation in order to generate an insight, rather than to mirror a larger segment of empirical reality. Also, this particular meeting was ‘important’ to organisational members in so far as it, its actors, the changes and the process of change itself were frequently discussed and commented on. Evidence for this has been provided in previous chapters. Finally, the analysis of this particular meeting is embedded in a much wider investigation into sense-making processes to which it



contributes understanding about the role of leadership (“new voices”) in the management of meaning.

Meaning must not assumed to be fixed (“The rest talks back!”), metonymical categorisation mechanisms (what is an academic?) were divergent, although the meaning parameters of the economic discourse restricted the understanding of the sign “academic”. McNay (1994) points out that the generation of new ideas is limited, because of the constraining influence of dominant discourses, which limit the origination of both new causal linkages between signs or new translation processes between signs of previously unrelated areas.

Continuing with the analysis of the processes and tactics of hegemonial meaning, metonymical texts (website, brochure) were selected to investigate the interplay of metaphors and metonymies which result in “normalisation” processes. These were shown to create a (new) “order”, which relied on the privileging of some voices - an elite minority - over others. The textual construction of reality (via the website) was juxtaposed with the experience made by organisational members when moving into the new building. Metaphorical expressives described the new metonymic container as symbolising a degrading status with regards to professional status. The meaning world had turned upside down. The exercise of power as ubiquitous processes at the interstices of everyday organisational talk and practice was seen to be in a dialectical relationship with the exercise of resistance. Resistance as in the trope irony, as emerging in small

collectives, is as dispersed as the exercise of power in so far as it is a process of minute, scattered resignification.

### Resistance in Language

As was shown, it is possible to share meaning and enact it in everyday practice, but simultaneously there is divergent meaning, divergent interpretation of signs and events challenging the attempts to integrate all voices into a harmonious chorus, which sings from *one hymn sheet* (fieldnote, open meeting, 12 May 1997).

In terms of metaphors, their potential to reframe the conceptual basis of understanding renders them essential to the process of re-evaluation and change (Manning 1979, Morgan 1983) both outside and inside organisations (Barrett and Cooperrider 1990; Tsoukas 1991, 1993). In one example the comparison between a meeting/relationship with the Centre and football as a competitive leisure activity was drawn to better control the processes of this meeting. The particularisation process (Ortony 1975) inherent in the metaphorical translation was accepted within the organisational boundaries, but critically queried without. The particularisation process outside the meeting related football to a physically and aesthetically pleasing experience. This is an instance where pre-existing conceptions are altered not by applying a different metaphor, but by “filling” it with different meaning. In doing so, a refusal to “to accept that what we perceive as social reality [as] incontrovertible” (Grant and Oswick 1996:3) has taken place. This refusal takes the same metaphorical form, but particularises the content of



the form to create different meaning. However, the power of the divergent particularisation process needs to be qualified, since it happened outside the meeting in a private enclave (Cohen and Taylor 1992) rendering the sense-making private and personal rather than organisational. However, as Hollway (1989) would argue, discourses and how we construct our selves within them overlap. Thus the boundaries between private enclaves and organisational contexts are not as clear-cut as to deny interactive potential. Certainly, from the auto-ethnographer's point of view, the exploration of dialectics rather than the insistence on dichotomies is the most conducive way forward to better understand sense-making processes.

The re-particularisation points to a search for something outside the pre-given sense-making frameworks and its limitations. The vocabulary of an alternative meaning framework points to the aesthetic mode of existence (de Certeau 1984) as a way in which the dominance of 'paramount reality' and its sense-making can be subverted: "The thin film of writing becomes a movement of strata, a play of places. A different world (the reader's) slips into the author's space ... speakers,[who] in the language into which they insert both the message of their native tongue and, through their accent, through their own 'turns of phrase'" (de Certeau 1984: xxi) create "slips through that fabric" of reality (Cohen and Taylor 1992: 170).

In another instance the 'challenge' to meaning-creation took place in an open organisational context, via the e-mail system. The discussed report, "Tom's paper" both

interpreted the past and constructed the future. The overall meaning of the paper was disputed by one organisational member, Geoffrey, who, drawing on the metaphorical framework of the French revolution, described the overall meaning of the paper as “allocating blame”. This was answered by Tom within the given metaphorical framework with *I am still knitting*. This e-mail can be viewed as an act of resistance in so far as the interpretation of past events is strongly criticised by drawing on a historical perspective. The rejection of the official attribution of meaning to the past (and the future) is an assertion of the individual identity as an independent thinker refuting both literally and metaphorically the scripting of the past and the future. Within the social-reality-as-text metaphor, the reading of this text is divergent in so far as the scripted nature of the past and the future is refuted. This, again, points to de Certeau’s reflections on how individuals subvert the apparently dominant meaning systems by adding their own accents or turn of phrases. In contrast to the first instance of metaphorical resistance, this incident happened in the public domain of the school. Although the act of resisting did not lead to the paper being amended or an organising of other resistant voices, it nevertheless points to the existence of divergent interpretations.

However, the power of dominant metaphors must not be underestimated. In one example I quoted one senior research manager’s insistence of *writing to J4*, the need to create *a J4 environment* or else *you are dead*. Reality had already been written by agents outside the organisation and any attempt of non-compliance or simply ignoring this “fact” is metaphorically leading to the termination of existence in this reality.

There is no escaping the master script, the paramount reality (Berger and Luckman



1966). It was queried by one speaker (*I don't know what J4 means* - whether this question was put deliberately or not does not matter, it does challenge this reality), leading to a confrontational exchange of words. However, this non-compliance is widespread within the school. Many staff *will not be bullied into research*, a refusal to enact the paramount reality evoked in the J4 symbol. The latter words were uttered by a friend who refused to accept the “normality” of the metonymical link between research-active/output and gaining promotion/keeping your job.

Notwithstanding these instances of refusal or resistance, it remains difficult to escape the practices of powerful metaphors, including the Time is Money metaphor. I have shown how the enactment of this metaphor allows time to be quantified and measured. On the basis of this quantifying process organisational practices such as the workload system are constructed. In one quote a colleague pointed to the discrepancy between the experience of work (which was felt to require more and more effort) and the workload system, which attributes hours for activities. Also, within that system some processes are privileged over others as expressed in the *sweaty hands* versus *doing sexy things* metaphors. Within this frame it was shown how the experience of “emotional labour” remains unacknowledged within and outside the organisation.

Acts of resistance remain scattered and unorganised, being enacted at the interstices of everyday practices just as power is. Frequently, resistance is expressed in the trope irony.

Ironically labelling ‘containers’ (metonymies) as *Dirty Dyson* or *Sleepy Hollow* (Totley) expresses discontent with the status quo or mocks the ‘contained’ (the people). Irony is a double-edged figure, poised between conservatism and change. I have discussed this trope at several occasions and will draw the findings together to conclude about the nature and functions of irony.

The use of sarcasm at an appointment day (*For heaven’s sake they give themselves fancy titles like interview co-ordinator, but ‘piss-up’ and ‘brewery’ spring to mind eternally. What’s wrong with actually being a competent secretary?*) as well as irony (... *all these activities are managed, of course. Everyone in the school is a leader. [Facetiously]. We have course leaders. Susanne is a course leader. There are subject leaders, Bert is a subject leader and so on. So if Susanne wants some Germany for her course, she will talk to Bert. Not that this has got anything to do with German.*)

The first part of this quotation was ironic in so far as it juxtaposes the vernacular (*piss up, brewery*) with poetic language (*mind, eternally*), thus providing a sarcastic commentary on organisational incompetence in general and the organisation of the appointment day in particular. Sarcasm is a rhetorical technique to remove the privileged status (interview co-ordinator) and reveal taken-for-granted reality (Fine and Martin 1995). Elements of parody (*piss-up, brewery*) are used to ridicule organisational grandeur and bombast. Fine and Martin call it “the least kindly form of humour.”

(p.175); whether the inverted meaning is successfully decoded depends on the audience and whether it is potentially sympathetic and identifies with the “sarcastic” (Ball, 1965,



in Fine and Martin). Given the context of the first remark, a discussion involving the panel members, it can be assumed that meaning was inferred sympathetically and successfully. With regards to the second commentary, which was made in front of the applicants as a way of introducing the school's practices, it remains more doubtful. In ironic commentaries (as on the 'leadership' sign) metaphorical functions are invoked (Winner and Gardner 1993) in so far as two different meaning systems are evoked, thus bringing into contact different discourses. This 'contact-making' provides a possibility for moderating meaning and in doing so contributing to change processes. Wertsch (1991) pointed to the 'multivoicedness' of irony, which evokes different meaning worlds. Sperber and Wilson (1986) say that irony is "echoic interpretation" (p. 237). Thus, the 'echoes' of both academic and economic discourses meet in irony, with the discursive practices of the economic/managerial discourse being ridiculed. The speaker's attitude is left implicit, leaving it to the audience to gather meaning from tone of voice, context or other paralinguistic clues (wriggling of fingers) (Tway 1976a, Tway 1976b).

However, even though meaning is amended in so far as a critical gloss is painted over the established meaning system, the same signs ('leadership') are used. I argued that the failure to 'escape' language constrains irony's emancipatory potential. Furthermore, being an ironic commentator may simply become part of how a role is 'carried off'. In this respect the ironic individual confirms rather than challenges the meaning system. In particular, more sarcastic comments are conservative in character rather than critical in a

reflective way. Irony can be profoundly conservative. In particular, if it is enacted from the point of view of superiority (Burke 1941), in which case it contains two elements: The affirmation of (individual) superior wit (and thereby an affirmation of individual integrity, Nevis 1987) as well as an expression of opposition to the cultural imperative. The first element is essentially conservative in nature, the second applies a critical perspective.

Irony as enacted from a “humble” perspective (Burke 1941:434) embraces a third element, which is the ability to question one’s own superiority by including the ironic commentator in the ironic observations. I believe that this use of irony entails a greater potential for change in so far as the rigidity of dichotomical positions of “superiority” and “inferiority” are resolved into the dynamics of mutuality or “dialectic irony” (Burke 1941:435). Instances of dialectic irony are recognisable by, for example, the metaphorical use of pronouns (*not that we would jump to conclusions*), which include the speaker in the critical observation.

Irony as a simple conversation opener (example: telephone conversation) opening with the line *How are things in lovely Dyson* showed it to be a playful device drawing on shared meaning (in this case the knowledge that Dyson House is not nice). Although the irony of the opening line was understood in so far as the answer evoked the ‘Totley-Dyson’ dichotomy, it did not follow the conversational rules in so far as the playfulness of the ironic question was answered with ‘seriousness’. In this example irony is shown



to draw on collective meaning. The ironic question itself was intended to be “social” rather than critical, although the answer took up the critical potential.

In sum, instances of divergent, oppositional as well as ambiguous meaning are plentiful and form one Gestalt with the diffusely scattered practices of power. In this regard individuals are neither completely free, self-determined agents nor are they the passive, oppressed subjects entangled in heteronomous meaning systems and their discursive practices. Central to this argument is the notion of ‘relational’. That power and resistance are in a mutually dependent relationship, that meaning systems are continuously re-determined, shaped, affirmed and rejected. It is my contention that the dynamics and complexities of the power-resistance relationship can be explored by using the tropological method.

### **7.3. Investigating Meaning: A Tropological Approach**

As my contribution to the field of organisation theory I wish to propose an approach based mainly on figures of speech in order to investigate organisational meaning systems. This method, though parsimonious in so far as it suggest only three tropes as investigation tools, requires complex, sophisticated and sympathetic interpretation of data. In sum, it can only come alive within the hermeneutic tradition.

This approach is ‘new’ in so far as it combines ideas taken from three different organising frameworks. In the studies that were reviewed in chapter two most studies used one approach only, some combined two different traditions. I critiqued the studies with the main issues concerning the presentation of social reality as objective and true,

the management of the authorial voice, the lack of acknowledgement of human agency or espousal of a critical perspective. Following on from this review, organising frameworks for data analysis were selected with a view to combine different traditions to enrich data interpretation.

The model I suggest for understanding organisational processes emerged during the course of the overlapping activities of reading, researching and reflecting. It is an approach based on the tropes metonymy, metaphor and irony. An analysis of how and when the trope metonymy is used in an organisational setting will reveal insights into sense-making as well as symbolic ordering processes. This approach can be applied to geographical settings, artifact(s), in particular buildings, texts, talk, and including stories to reveal processes of combination and deletion based on tacit knowledge and default assumptions. Understanding the character of metonymy as based on the principle of causal or physical contiguity will render it possible to see metonymies enacted and to derive understanding of how they contain cultural knowledge and form part of sense-making processes. On the basis of this comprehension, critical understanding becomes a possibility, in so far as the apparent 'normality' of organisational ordering is shown to be relying on hidden meaning processes. Making assumptions, in particular the hidden 'logic' inherent in causal contiguities, explicit, renders them open to debate and thereby changeable.

The analysis of the trope metaphor is much more established in organisation theory, be it as an organising framework (Palmer and Dunford 1996, Clegg and Gray 1996) or in



an inductive way (Hirsch and Andrews 1983). As such this part of the tropological model is to be positioned in a long tradition, where, I believe, the main insights about metaphors as meaning carriers (Grant and Oswick 1996, Lakoff and Johnson 1980), as vehicles of both change and constraint (Chia 1996, Marshack 1996, Pondy 1983, Schön 1993), expressives of values and emotions (Ortony 1975) have been made. In this regard, my findings confirm this tradition. However, it is possible within the tropological approach to view metaphors in a dialectical relationship with metonymy. The importance of this relationship has not been acknowledged widely (it is acknowledged by Barley 1983, Fernandez 1986, Levi-Strauss 1962, Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Lodge 1977) by organisational researchers. Paying heed to metonymical-cum-metaphorical constructions will provide deep insights into symbolic processes, the creation and maintenance of sense.

Finally, the trope irony is juxtaposing meaning domains, so that the intended meaning contradicts customary meaning. Since its functions are different from those of metaphor or metonymy, it needs to be included as a separate trope. The use of irony can indicate different intentions, ranging from being an expression of 'conchetto', an astute criticism of the status quo, and the establishment of a social relationship between colleagues. However, it always points to an uneasiness with the current and 'normal' organisational processes. Therefore, irony constitutes an excellent point of departure to spot and investigate instances of organisational friction, where meaning worlds clash. In sum, a

tropological approach to the investigation of organisational processes and practices provides a comprehensive method to make explicit tacit sense-making processes.

#### **7.4. Learning and Paradigms**

The espoused paradigm within which the thesis is written is within Burrell and Morgan's (1979) definition the interpretive one, with the hermeneutic tradition of interpretation and 'verstehen' providing the main method to enquiry. This tradition emphasises notions of holism, context and symbols (Agar 1980b) and embraces "the importance of the intuitive apprehension of patterns" (p.255) as a valuable, indeed a necessary, part of the research process. Given these prerequisites of the hermeneutic research process, I found my position as an auto-ethnographer helpful in entangling webs of meaning and in researching the role of tropes in sense-making processes. Not denying the existence of bias and partiality (Becker 1970), the auto-ethnographic situation brings them to the fore, so that they can become part of the account itself. Furthermore, the inclusion of intuition and "hunches" as legitimate utensils of the research process was an important addition to the understanding and interpretation of data. As before, I found the auto-ethnographic position helpful in achieving a holistic position.

Burrell and Morgan (1979) suggest that social inquiry involves a choice between "subjectivism" and "objectivism" and that these alternatives are "incommensurable" or "mutually exclusive" (p.viii). They maintain that in order to avoid what they refer to as



“ontological oscillation” (p.266) there must be consistency between one’s ontological and epistemological perspectives. The issue of paradigm incommensurability has been widely discussed within the sociological and organisational literature (Hassard 1991; Jackson and Carter 1991; Johnson 1995; Reed 1990; Weaver and Gioia 1994; Weick 1995; Willmott 1993).

This project is firmly positioned within a hermeneutic tradition and the assumptions of the interpretive paradigm; by dint of its insistence on subjective understanding, its chosen method is ‘Auslegung’. The selection of organising frameworks provided the ‘perspective shift’ for data interpretation. The application of different theoretical frameworks to data interpretation also constitutes a break with a purely ethnographic approach as based on exclusive immersion in the field. Furthermore, the chosen frameworks draw on different meta-theoretical assumptions. A structuralist framework embraces assumptions about objective truth and facts; the speech act framework underlines the social construction of reality, the discursive framework assumes a world of conflict of interest, domination and resistance to ideological and hegemonial forces. Although these different assumptions have been synthesised and resolved in an overall hermeneutic tradition, a learning process took place which implies an adjustment of my paradigmatic position. On the basis of the interpretive paradigm and my need to understand the social world as it is on the level of subjective experience I conducted a lengthy enquiry into one organisation. The process of increasing understanding informed the insight of the necessity of change within this setting. An alignment

towards the frame of reference of the radical humanist paradigm has occurred, “which emphasises the importance of overthrowing or transcending the limitations of existing social arrangements.” (Burrell and Morgan 1979: 32). One might argue that the admittance of a realignment of one’s paradigmatic position at the end of a thesis is rendering oneself vulnerable to accusations of inconsistency. Notwithstanding such concerns and the precariousness inherent in changing positions, I would argue that within the employed ‘journey’ metaphor for this thesis, intellectual development (i.e. learning) is part of the journey and therefore reject the theoretical stalemate implied in “ontological oscillation” (Burrell and Morgan 1979: 266). In both paradigms, the interpretive as well as the radical humanist, the basis for understanding is subjective, in so far as the qualitative researcher must “make explicit what tends to be only implicit in much scientific practice.” (Henwood and Pigeon 1992: 101). Rendering explicit the discovery of the theory itself, the involvement of the researcher in the research scene, the explication of meta-theoretical research assumptions, including the management of the authorial voice, form part of the ethnographic tradition. This tradition has been upheld throughout the thesis.

With regard to this project, a tradition of working within one paradigm has been upheld in so far as the analysis was conducted within the parameters of the interpretive paradigm. However, the emphasis of this thesis is on “blurring” rigid dichotomies (eg between subject and object, agents and the structures they activate and use etc) by critically investigating how (inter) subjective meaning worlds form a dialectic whole



with environmental meaning systems. This follows the logic of what Weaver and Gioia (1994) advocate as to “intelligibly unify, or at least bridge, these conflicting paradigms while still maintaining their diversity in some significant measure” (p.568). I believe, part of the ‘bridging exercise’ happened within this thesis in so far as a realignment process of my paradigmatic position occurred. Within the espoused journey metaphor the re-alignment is intellectual travelling or learning.

The authorial voice manifests itself in the writing of the text, which is, of course, a metonymical vehicle carried forward by causal contiguity and activating the *pars pro toto* principle of synecdoche. The text, any text according to Lodge (1977) draws on both metaphorical and metonymic aspects. The metaphorical aspects include more overtly persuasive features (e.g. the description of the open meeting, where a new voice established itself) in the overall organisation of the larger text. Of course, this text as any text, is never complete: “... the text can in no way furnish a literal description or transcription of people, places or events. By the same token, no such description can be exhaustive. Indeed, any attempt at a literal and complete description is doomed to appear absurd rather than realistic or ‘scientific’” (Atkinson 1990:40), resulting in “metonymic overkill” (Lodge 1977:237). Elements of metaphorical writing need to inform texts in order to preserve clarity and understand.

The rhetorical element of this text (Atkinson 1990, Brown 1977, Hammersley 1993, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, Van Maanen 1988) are acknowledged, though I would argue that an ironic stance as “generic” to ethnography and sociology (Anderson and

Sharrock 1983, Atkinson 1990) has been minimised, though not eradicated, in this project. The distance between researcher and researched that is a necessary prerequisite to irony is transcended into a dialectic whole, where the spatial metaphor of inside-outside bears little relevance to the ethnographic study. Therefore, “dialectic irony” (Burke 1941) that integrates the writer/observer into the narrative is the third (other than metaphor and metonymy) rhetorical device of this text.

The metonymical and metaphorical aspects of the text condenses what it stands for into symbolic meaning, which is only to be decoded in the reader-text interaction. Thus the interpretation of this text takes on the qualities of a third-order interpretation: I have interpreted the meaning world of organisational members as expressed in tropes and render my interpretation open to a debate. My meta-theoretical assumption is that meaningful interpretation of social reality is possible, despite its constructed character. From a personal point of view it is hoped that the thesis will take on the symbolism of an academic rite-of-passage (Frost and Taylor 1996).

## **7.5. Personal Conclusion**

The journey as put into concrete form in the text began with puzzlement, which has been resolved. In this respect this thesis may be likened to a ‘Bildungsroman’ (novel concerned with the intellectual and spiritual development of characters). The intellectual development is easier to point out than the spiritual one, because the development of the theoretical framework itself, the tropological approach, bears



evidence to intellectual effort. Furthermore, I found the process of writing in itself difficult, since many ideas were but mere “shades” in my mind and making them explicit was demanding. Being between two languages (German, English) can be “terribly frustrating”: “From time to time he dreamed in Greek, a terrible frustration for his sleeping soul because this necessarily slowed the pace of his dreams’ narrative, and he discovered that when speaking it his personality was different from when he spoke in Italian. He felt a fiercer man, and, for some extraordinary reason which had nothing to do with his beard, much hairier.” (Louis de Bernieres, *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*)

There was emotional development, too; although some emotions have been successfully “transported”, others linger on. Some personal epiphanies occurred in the process of reflection, leading to a re-evaluation of the nature of my work, the organisation I am working in as well as my life in general. William James (in Cohen and Taylor 1992:171) describes this state of mind as “reality slips”; they are “unaccountable invasive alterations of consciousness”. In the process of the research, in particular the writing of the text, I re-evaluated what I would like to do and to become and what not: I would like to apply the tropological approach to other settings to engage in meaningful research: In a Guardian article (1997), the Rabbi Julia Neuberger reports on spiritual care for patients in hospitals and elsewhere. She confirms the need for getting “data ... in order to get further useful information to help us treat further generations of patients better. ... Research about the usefulness of spiritual care, albeit ill-defined, might need to be different. It might need to be more qualitative and less quantitative. It might need to comprise a bit of tender loving care, a sign of genuine interest in the well-being of a

particular patient, alongside the research.” A research project based on these premises is in my understanding “meaningful”.

Becoming a manager is still an option, albeit a manager who is able to develop what McAuley (1985:294) describes as “the development of abilities to be at the same time involved and detached, self-aware and immersed.” Progressing ‘up the organisational hierarchy’ for its own sake is no longer an option, whereas working alongside students and practising managers to disentangle webs of meaning is.

There was - there is - a spiritual side, which I first encountered when coming across the “voice metaphor” and the struggle of individuals to lead a meaningful existence and to be more than a passing, insignificant “handful of dust”.

I end this thesis in as precarious a state as I begun it: “For although I believe I know what the real miracles are, my belief in God disturbs and unsettles me much more than not believing ever did, unbelief seems vastly harder to me now than belief does, but belief poses so many unanswerable questions!” (John Irving, *A Prayer for Owen Meany*).



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## **APPENDIX 1 Interview Agenda**

### **NEWCOMER INTERVIEWS**

In total, five newcomers were interviewed; two of which left SBS after one year. These two colleagues were only interviewed twice. The other three participants were interviewed five times, although - as recorded in chapter three - the boundaries between interview setting and work setting became increasingly blurred. This happened to the extent that I decided to abandon the initial plan of conducting a total of eight interviews per participant. The interviews were conducted over a period of approximately 24-28 months and took between thirty and forty minutes.

The questions that provided a structure for parts of the first two interview rounds were the same in all interviews. They shall be outlined briefly. The questions for subsequent interviews were derived from the previous ones, e.g. if in one interview an issue about the difference between undergraduate and postgraduate work arose, I took this up in the following interview in order to see if any developments had happened.

#### **First Interview Round**

Questions that I asked in this first set of interviews concerned the reason for applying for a position at SBS (“why did you apply for the position?”), anticipatory socialisation (“what did the interview day feel like?”, “Did you know anything about SBS before you applied?”), the entry experience (“How would you describe the first few days/the first few weeks?”), the formation of relationships, both formal and informal (“Who is your first port of call?” “Whom do you talk to most at the moment?”) and questions seeking out the surprise element (“Was there anything that surprised or irritated you, or anything you simply noted as ‘different’?”)

#### **Second Interview Round**

In this set I tried to explore the development of relationships and to illicit comments about the participants responsibilities as well as how they experienced working in the university environment. The questions I asked were more open (“What kind of teaching are you doing?” “Have you been given an admin. job?”, “Have you met any new colleagues?”, “Have you had a lot of contact with your line manager/unit leader?” “How are you feeling/how are things going?”, “Have you met with a problem?” “How did you solve it?”)



### Third and Fourth Interview Round

By the time of these rounds, only three interviewees were left. I started to explore different themes with the participants, based on the previous two interviewees, but also on their current preconceptions (“Is there anything in particular that’s on your mind currently?”). In one case the relationship with and integration into the subject group remained problematic, due to his location in Dyson, whereas all but one other subject group members were located in Totley. This led to an exploration of the impact of the geographical setting on the organisation and character of the school. The second colleague had joined SBS from an background in industry and found teaching intriguing, though difficult. Themes around ‘becoming a lecturer’ were paramount in our talks, with the focus on the process of teaching, including the preparatory work, the difference in student groups, the emotional labour involved in teaching and inconsistencies between undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The third colleague was trying to establish himself as a researcher, which led to discussions around the lack of a research culture, the struggle of doing a part time thesis, networking and general constraints of being a researcher in a new university environment.

### Fifth Interview Round

This round concluded the schedule. Initially, I briefly summed up the themes we had talked about in previous meetings and asked the participants if my summary fairly reflected previous talks. The interviewees then determined the content of the final interview by commenting on my summary, pointing out changes that had happened or reflecting on their past words from the perspective of the present. All three participants had by then become course leaders of postgraduate programmes and comments and stories about encounters with students, missing marks and ineffective support systems dominated the talks. After this round the official interviewing schedule had come to an end, although the informal exchange of experiences continued.

### INTERVIEWS WITH PEERS/FRIENDS

These were unstructured interviews. Those with colleagues as peers were officially set up and tape recorded. They took about forty to fifty minutes, although the same dynamics I described before happened as well. Other than setting up a date, time and venue for the interviews I did not prepare an agenda, but took by clue from my colleagues or their environment. In total, I set up three interviews, two of which developed into group interviews, since colleagues joined into the process.

‘Interviews’ with colleagues as friends happened often spontaneously, either at work or in our homes. If I intended to use some excerpts or comments as data, I asked permission to do so. These talks were not tape recorded, nor did I ‘count’ how many ‘interviews’ were



conducted. This data exemplifies the nature of this project, in so far as the boundaries between 'researcher' and 'researched' blend to an extent that the dichotomy collapses into intersubjectivity.

### Interview One

The colleague was quite upset when I entered the room. After an offer to delay the interview had been declined, I asked for the reason for his upset. This led to an exploration of the underlying issues (changed nature of the work, the university, the relationship with students), which took over an hour.

### Interview Two

Promotional material about courses and open days was piling up in this office and I asked whether and if so, how, my colleague was involved in this work. This led to a discussion about the importance of marketing as a major part of her workload. A colleague joined this discussion, which then explored the different responsibilities we carried, leading to an exploration of our identities of lecturers and academics.

### Interview Three

In this interview the colleague, a linguist herself, wanted to know the details of my thesis which I was happy to provide. This led us to a discussion about the purpose of research, the changed role of research and the established research structure. A colleague joined the discussion at this point, taking her clue from the word 'structure' and commented on current attempts of restructuring the linguists, which led to a discussion of the status of languages in the school.

## **INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERIENCED/RETIRED COLLEAGUES**

Other than setting the scene with one question at the beginning ("How long have you been involved in Higher Education?"), the interviews took their course as determined by the participants. I conducted four interviews, out of which two had taken the early retirement scheme. The interviews took between thirty to forty minutes.

### Interview One (retired colleague)

With this colleagues I discussed the purpose and nature of teaching as either vocationally based or for its own sake. The main issue that emerged was the issues arising from a system of mass education and cuts in resources, leading to changes in the core of the learning-teaching relationship.

### Interview Two (retired colleague)

Following my initial question, a critical evaluation of the current structural status quo was given. The school/university was framed as an over-managed organisation, which increasingly moved away from democratic modes of governance. Instrumentalism, for students and lecturers alike, was identified as the new *modus operandi*. The assessment of the situation was critical, though the pedagogical enthusiasm identified as intact, being the “counter pole” to instrumentalism.

### Interview Three

In this interview similar issues were explored, though the changes in structure and relationships were mainly attributed to growth and success and viewed as problematic only in so far as the size of the school led to a lack of clarity. This was viewed as a motivational problem, in particular for younger members of staff, who lacked a clear career path. Students were experienced as more demanding, the nature of the lecturer-student relationship having changed to a service provider - client relationship.

### Interview Four

In this interview the participant acknowledged fundamental changes in the past twenty years, resulting in a decrease of autonomy, but also stated, that he was quite comfortable with this and that the increase in structure, in particular for students, resulted on the whole in greater clarity and predictability. The relationship with students was discussed in some detail, leading to an exploration about the link between research and teaching.





*Sheffield Business School*

**DRAFT**

## **MEMORANDUM**

**To**

**From**

**Date**

**Copies to**

### **School of Business and Management Restructuring**

The decision by the Board of Governors to establish a Graduate School in Business and Management to be called the 'new' Sheffield Business School (nSBS) gives us an opportunity to address some of the fundamental problems facing the new School of Business and Management (SBM); and to put in place the people, systems and structures to exploit the potential of the BITC that will secure our long term survival as a provider of business and management education.

This paper aims to provoke debate so that we might begin to confront some of the problems in the school and to start the process of academic restructuring. The paper covers the context, the problems, and restructuring options.

### **Context**

During the next few years the main issues facing SBM include the Dearing review, continued pressures for efficiencies, continued selectivity in funding for research and taught postgraduate, intense regional competition, and the development of flexible learning. SBM must position itself to take advantage of the Dearing review and should seek to be one of the top business and management schools in the UK recruiting nationally and internationally. In addition with new premises in the BITC the school must be the main provider of business and management education in the region offering continuous professional development and lifelong learning opportunities.

### **Problems in SBM**

There have been serious problems in SBS in terms of our external reputation, our capability to meet internal university standards, and the low level of staff morale. These are demonstrated by a range of indicators such as: the HEFCE quality assessment rating of "satisfactory"; the RAE rating of 3b; the rejection of the AQR; the failure to achieve postgraduate targets; the financial position of the school; the



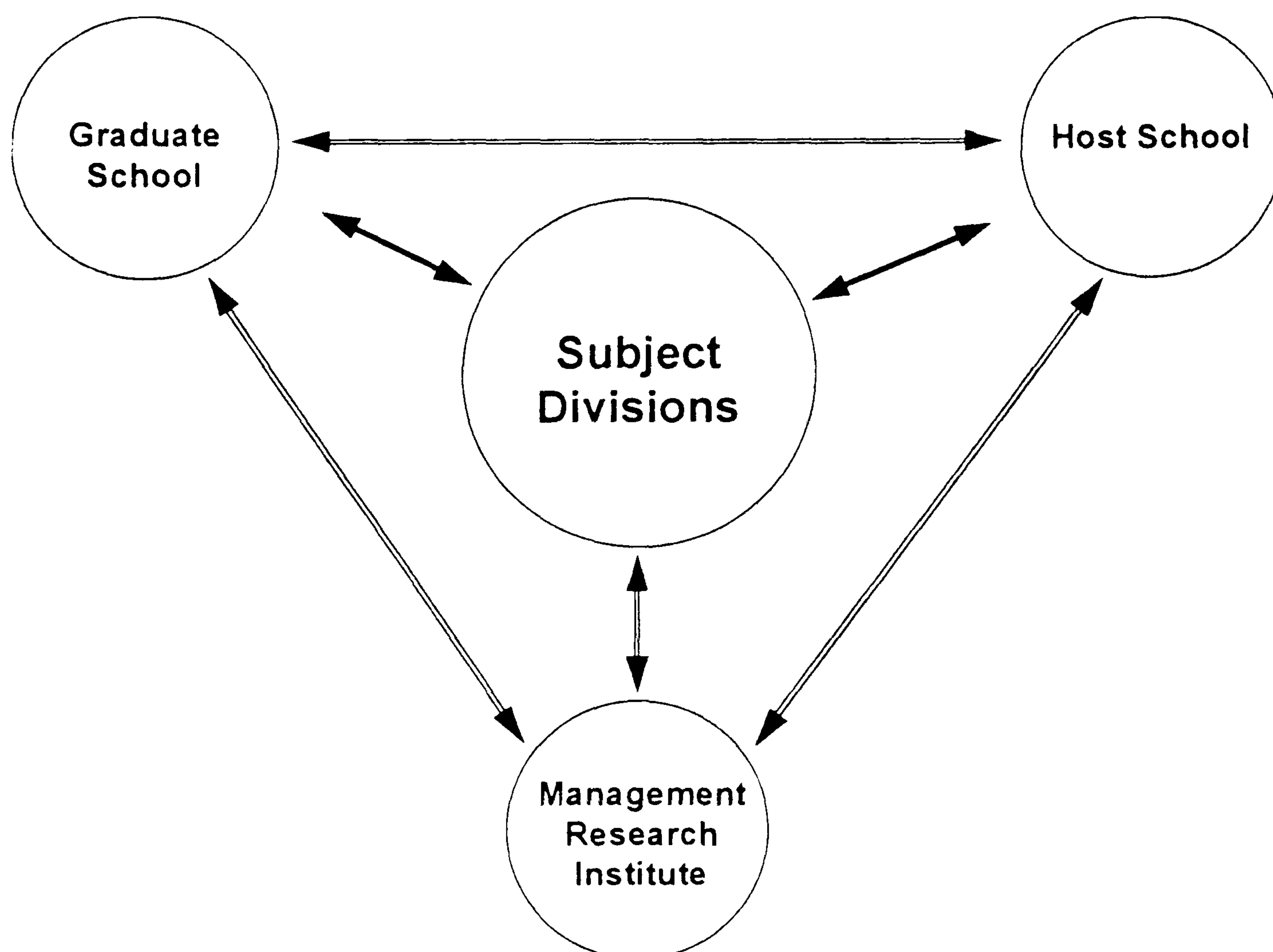
number of student appeals and complaints. There are several inter-related reasons for these problems but the most significant include: ineffective leadership and management; an avoidance of management responsibility; a confused matrix organisation structure; ineffective systems and support services; low employee commitment.

No single solution can address all these issues but the reorganisation of the school and the reallocation of leadership roles are a crucial starting point.

## School Restructuring

People manage organisations not structures, however, it is clear that SBM should be restructured to meet the immediate problems identified above. The reorganisation of activities will provide more focused leadership and teams with clear responsibilities for specific areas of activity. Such reorganisation is not easy and must be done with proper consultation and involvement of all staff so that ***change is managed through people***.

It is clear that academic staff are at the centre of all our activities in terms research, teaching, and consultancy. Academic staff provide the driving force for expanding knowledge, curriculum development, new product development, and other forms of professional development. Academic staff are the custodians of our external reputation through their professional activities, and they provide the integration between the new graduate school, the host schools, and the management research institute. This has been emphasised by the Subject Group Leaders in the diagram below:





Thus, it would seem that Subject Divisions can provide an academic structure that reflect these issues and place us in a position to respond to the strategic context facing higher education, and in particular the Dearing Inquiry when the creation of external standards agencies are envisaged that will focus on subject areas for both teaching and research. It is essential that such divisions have budgets and financial responsibility in order to give them the authority to implement their day to day activities and to provide the basis for academic development across a range of areas. This would redress the imbalance in authority in relation to responsibility that occurs in the present matrix structure.

The Subject Group Leaders have argued very strongly for the retention of subject groups with leaders within divisions to ensure academic identity and to create a collegial environment that will facilitate teamwork and continuous professional development. It has been agreed that this might not be on the basis of extra management allowances for such roles.

The proposed new structure assumes the incorporation of Management Sciences into SBM and the retention of languages. The school would be organised into 5 subject divisions that would include staff, the specialist routes of the undergraduate courses and some new specialist undergraduate courses. This would provide much more academic focus and clarify management responsibility. The general undergraduate courses would integrate across the divisions and continue to be managed by a head of undergraduate programmes with course leaders. The suggested divisions are as follows:

Division	Subject Groups
International Business and Public Policy	Public Policy International Business
Languages	Languages
Management Sciences?	Business Decision Making? Management Sciences?
Organisation and Human Resources?	Human Resource Management Organisational Behaviour
Strategy and Marketing	Management Strategy Marketing

A copy of the proposed organisation structure is attached.

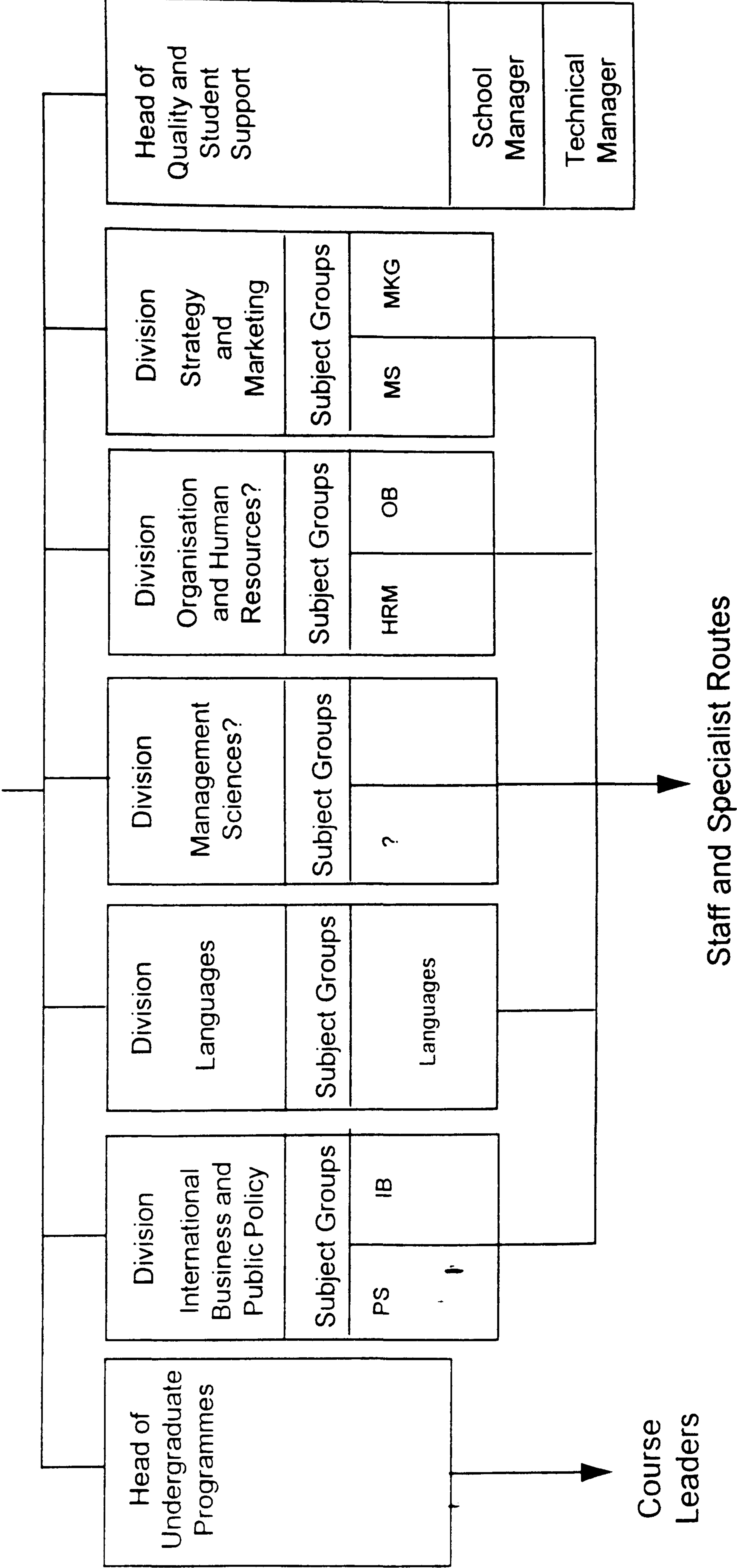
## Consultation Process

The proposals have been put to the Subject Group Leaders for discussion and amendment. After discussion at the Executive the proposals will go back to Subject Group Leaders and then to Subject Group Meetings before returning to the Executive for decision. A period of possible staff transfer between Subject Groups should then be permitted.



# SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT - OPTION 1

DIRECTOR



Appendicies 3 and 4 not available in  
this digital copy