

**Spontaneity and Power:
Theatre Improvisation as Processes
of Change in Organizations**

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Abstract

Theatre has gained wider use in organizational change processes, either as Forum Theatre inspired by Boal (1998, [1979] 2000) or as improvisation inspired by Johnstone (1981, 1999); and in recent years, a number of authors have reflected upon this when seeking to understand its impact. Some suggest that theatre is a kind of laboratory where change takes place beside and after the work with theatre. Others, such as postmodernists, see theatre as a forum for revealing the oppression that can exist within organizations.

This thesis takes another direction. Forum Theatre has been an inspiration; but, based on my experience of working with theatre improvisation as processes for organizational change, I have come to negate Boal's understanding of Forum Theatre as Theatre of the Oppressed. Instead I see conflicts between people in the organization as key. I argue for a link between theatre improvisation and understanding human interaction as complex responsive processes, and I come to see organizations and organizational change as temporal and constantly recreated through local interactions among people, where power relations, seen as dependency, are essential. The processes of relating involve responding to each other in recognisable and yet surprising ways, that is, with spontaneity. Spontaneity can be recognized as liveliness: one finds oneself in spontaneous activity when one becomes unsure of the response the other will take to one's gesture. Daring to be spontaneous is essentially risky because it challenges power relations, which themselves are maintained only by continuously responding to each other in ways that are mutually expected.

Working with theatre improvisation is seen as paradoxically fictitious and real at the same time, because the actor's supposedly fictitious work is constantly met by a real response from the audience – real in the sense that people react from their own experience. By experiencing this together, power relations are immediately changing – not as a result of the work, but as a part of it. Theatre improvisation serves as an invitation to spontaneity, an invitation to be aware of changes in each other's reaction. The apparently fictitious character of the work makes it appear safe to do so.

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0 Introduction

This thesis consists of an introduction, four projects written consecutively over three years, and a synopsis. The projects emerge from experience that is typical of my daily work, and they consist of selected narratives that become the basis for reflection. I have chosen situations from my work that have caused me trouble or in other ways had the potential to influence my ways of thinking. I use narrative not to illustrate an established idea, point towards a conclusion or express a moral view, but as turning-points for reflection and development in my ways of thinking. I have continued with my daily work throughout the writing of this thesis, resulting in significant cross-fertilisation since my work has influenced my next draft, just as working on the drafts and discussing them has influenced my work with clients and colleagues.

I am working with theatre in organizational change, a particular form of consultancy. I will start with the introduction I wrote to my project one.

0.1 Being a consultant in a theatre (written July 2002)

For more than three years now I have been working in a private consultancy company, the Dacapo Theatre. We specialise in using theatre as a way of working through organizational issues. We have grown quickly, from eight people three years ago to 25 people at the current time. The methods we use, and the ways we think about theatre and consulting, have evolved over this time to keep pace with the changing context within which we work.

The kind of theatre that we have used since our inception is *forum theatre*. This was invented by Augusto Boal, who worked with theatre in Brazil (Boal, [1979] 2000). As with any drama, there is a conflict performed by the actors. But in forum theatre the play stops in the middle of the conflict, and the spectators are invited to participate. Boal calls the audience *spect-actors*, people who are both looking at the play and involved in it. Forum theatre actors are always improvis-

ing, working with the intentions expressed by members of the audience. Our clients come from many sectors, private as well as public, and we work with many different topics. In the first years of the Dacapo Theatre, we always used pre-written plays. One example is a play about change in the industrial sector, which we have now played more than 550 times. The play is about a semi-autonomous work group, and the actors demonstrate all the problems that evolve within the group itself and in its interactions with the organization. The play lasts one hour, and we do usually two hours of forum theatre afterwards, where the audience can try out their ideas (either by going on stage themselves or telling an actor what to say to the others). When one actor or someone from the audience tries out an idea, the other actors react to it in the role of the character they play, hence exerting a kind of resistance, an opposing force if it implicates change for their character. Usually we are three actors and one consultant working together.

In recent years we have further developed our methods. One method we use is to set up a play that dramatises a situation in which the participants express certain emotions. The improvised play will last maybe ten minutes, ending with a conflict or a dilemma, which we follow up by forum theatre. Another method is to improvise a situation immediately in front of the audience. The one who brings up the situation becomes the director, and tells the actors what to change to make it a situation the participants can recognise. Here we also use forum theatre when the situation has been played out.

My role as a consultant is to intervene in the theatre work¹. I stop the play and ask the audience what is going on. A situation might have emerged on stage, and someone from the audience explains what he has seen. I then encourage others who have perceived the situation differently to speak out, and very often people are surprised at seeing the same situation so differently. I also encourage the audience to try out their ideas by suggesting words or actions for the actors.

¹ Boal uses the term 'the joker' for this position in forum theatre.

‘Speak more nicely’ – an example

We met with the senior manager of a residential home for elderly people. Our brief: work with her employees so that they could establish some norms of behaviour for their way of communicating with elderly clients. She felt that they needed a kind of ‘professional’ way of talking, avoiding slang words because she wanted the clients to be treated with more respect.

Why did they talk this way? How did the elderly perceive it? These questions came to me, but I did not say so at the time, primarily because I wanted to encourage this client to be specific about what they wanted to achieve.

I was there with two actors, and beside her there was another manager and an employee. I encouraged them to mention some examples to each other, and they very quickly started to talk about a specific situation that one of them had observed.

They had an inmate who for most of his life had been a dock worker, and his way of talking reflected that. He used obscene language and was very direct to the employees. An employee had replied to him in a similar language, which was very unpleasant for the observer as it was perceived as very disrespectful.

What language did he use exactly? What did she say? What was their body language? The two actors played the situation. We adjusted the play until the observer was satisfied. Yes – this was the situation. I asked them for more detail. They tried several other ways, but to their surprise most of them ended up with a very bad reaction from the client, played by the actor. The actors played the original situation again, and they realised that the employee had a very good relationship with the client, although our observer originally had felt offended.

The senior manager became silent for a while. Obviously the little play had a great impact on her. The theme of the conversation changed. How could the employees achieve good relations with a client like him? We ended with a theme called: What is ‘quality’ in the context of conversation with the clients?

I meet with the client and talk with them about the issues of concern and how we could work with them to explore these. For this, we have also invented a new way of working. We bring the actors to the meeting with the clients, and we ask the

client to meet with people representing different perspectives. I encourage them to talk about the theme, but after a while I can stop the meeting, and ask the actors to play the situation we are talking about. Usually this changes the conversation to a more responsive direction. People listen and reflect carefully, and a conversation might emerge that these people have not previously expected.

The actors improvise when doing their part of our work. *Improviso* is a Latin word, meaning ‘unforeseen’. In everyday language, we use the word for situations where we have been unable to prepare ourselves, as though it would be better if we could prepare. For the actors, improvisation has a different meaning, since they are deliberately brought into situations that are unforeseen. Similarly I have found myself improvising together with actors and spectators alike. This approach is fundamental to my work as a consultant, and is a theme that I will explore in this doctorate.

0.2 Introducing the four projects

As the four projects have been written over a span of time, this thesis will be a journey for the reader through the changes I have seen in my way of working with theatre in organizations, and how I have come to see this changing me.

In January 2002 we had our first meeting as a cohort of 27 students. We divided into learning sets, study groups where we were supposed to work with each other’s projects, together with our supervisor. My learning set became:

- Karen Parsley, Director of Nursing at the University Hospital of Brighton
- David Wagstaff, English organizational consultant
- Sandra Pereira, manager in a Portuguese ministry
- Douglas Griffin, part of CMC as supervisor.

I started with the intention of doing an MA dissertation. As the other three wanted to go for the DMan they tried to encourage me to do the same. In the middle of drafts of my project one I decided to write the projects to DMan Standard, thinking that it would be easier to use this as a part of an MA dissertation than the op-

posite, but also highly inspired by being a part of this group. I realised that commenting on each other's draft projects and meeting for discussions was extremely important for my own work. All of us have critiqued numerous drafts. We have had discussions that have influenced my way of thinking hugely, and I have not been able to do this without careful comments from people in this group about content as well as language.

0.2.1 The four projects

Project one was written in 2002 as a reflection upon my work up to this point. However, in the final editing I have cut out this part, to focus on my theme.

What is presented here is a narrative I call 'the day of dissatisfaction', a piece of work I have been doing where the clients were unsatisfied with our work. This is followed by reflections about forum theatre and Boal's thinking.

In project two I worked with understanding communication. I had a hard time writing this project, as I also began to reconsider the methodology I was working with. I finished project two in April 2003.

Project three is about being a consultant meeting clients who think differently. I finished this project in October 2003.

In project four I return to theatre and the question: how can I understand the nature of our contribution of theatre improvisation in organizational settings? I finished this work in June 2004.

In the following the projects are presented consecutively, each followed by a few pages of reflections written in the process of constructing the synopsis, which is a fresh reading and reflection on all projects.

1 Forum Theatre in Organizations, Project One, July 2002

This project consists of two parts:²

1. A narrative about a recent job that ended with a dissatisfied client. This illuminates some of the conflicts and dilemmas that can result from the way I work with theatre.
2. I will trace back the way we have developed our work with theatre, in an effort to understand how I, the actors and the clients continue to work in a triangle of communication, participation and improvisation.

1.1 'The day of dissatisfaction' – a story from my work

We were to work with 90 people from a factory site specialising in assembling and packing medical devices. We (three actors and I) visited the workplace a week beforehand, to talk with some of the people and create a short play.

We started with a short meeting with Peter, who squeezed this in between his other activities. Peter had been the production manager for only a short time.

1.1.1 Visiting the company

Peter wanted us to work on collaboration between the production workers and the 'white collar' people, planning people and engineers. The 'white collar' people had offices separate from the production area, but within the next year they were all to move to a new place, which would bring them together in the same locality. Profound changes were planned for every second year, since the established production would be outsourced to other areas in Denmark, where the wages are lower. Peter was concerned about the collaboration between the different people and departments, because he anticipated that working in different project groups would be the way of working in the future.

² Parts of the original project have been excluded to meet word limit; this covered a reflection on my previous experience.

Peter also told of a change in the organization of production, which had just happened a month before. Formerly they were working in teams, each of them responsible for their own product. Now they had changed to a Japanese-inspired production approach called 'kanban'. All walls were removed, and all staff are now working on the same product at the same time. The work is organised around time slots that the logistic planners can operate with, so the workers now move from one place to another each day, organised by numbers allocated to each worker. The production index had increased from 80 to 100, which was crucial for the survival of the site; and Peter felt that the production workers were very happy about fulfilling the targets. A project group had made all the decisions, and Peter was very proud of the way they had been working. The group was called the Concorde group, and it consisted of 10 workers chosen because they were thought to be the opinion-formers.

I liked Peter, feeling that he was enthusiastic and at the same time concerned about the production people. Maybe I was a bit seduced, and unaware of the necessity of continuously relating to him. I did not meet him again before the day we met with the staff from the site.

1.1.1.1 Meeting the employees

On the visit, the four of us split up and talked with different people. From the shop floor we got another story. We talked with the supervisor and some of the employees. They were not particularly concerned about working together with the 'white collar' people. Instead, they were heavily engaged in problems on the shop floor. We talked with one of the ten 'opinion formers' of the Concorde group. She told us about people neglecting the rotation agreement. Later, a newly engaged employee expressed her confusion: some days she should stick to the rotation system, other days she was told to go to another machine. She told about informal leaders and the older workers not allowing the new ones to be a part of the workplace. They had flexitime, and she started very early every morning, so that she could pick up her child early in the afternoon. Some days some people had to stay longer within the flexitime to obtain the production index, and one day she experienced older workers next to her talking about how annoying it was that it al-

ways was the same people who had to stay later. They did not mention her at all, but she really felt that they were talking about her, and she felt angry.

At the same time, two of the actors visited the skilled workers who maintained the machines. Two workers were involved to start with, but within the next hour four more became involved in the discussion. They told stories about informal leaders from the old organization not giving up their power and privileges, problems about cliques and gossip in the production. Nina – the supervisor – later told us that, as a newcomer, it was very difficult to obtain ‘positive figures on the account’, meaning that it was not easy to be accepted.

By the end of the day, we had prepared two short plays. In the first play, an engineer and someone from planning would meet with someone from the shop floor, about a machine that was broken down. This play reflected their respective ways of seeing the world, and the potential conflict of such a meeting. The other showed a situation from the shop floor, about someone being new in the group and feeling excluded. We rehearsed these together with Nina the supervisor and someone from planning.

1.1.2 How did the day go?

We did the rehearsed plays in the morning in a setting with no direct reference to their company. There was much anxiety, but at the same time a lot of energy among the participants. Nobody wanted to go on stage, which is unusual, so our actors played the proposals from the audience. Only one agreed to go on stage – replacing the engineer. I thought that he did a good job, and the actors responded positively and it was still realistic. But when I asked, no one in the audience could see any difference, not even the one who went on stage. On the contrary, a group from the production were very agitated, and the forum work got into a pattern where they excluded the characters they did not like, one by one. Some of the people from the production heavily attacked the engineer, played by an actor, and he became more and more stigmatised. I expected someone in the audience to respond to the situation, but this did not happen, even when I asked about how

things might look from his perspective. Much of the same happened in the play from the production. It seemed as though the audience accepted the exclusion of the new person in the production, but they did it with a great deal of energy, which indicated to me that we were working with themes that were important for them.

1.1.2.1 Improvising a situation

In the afternoon several stories were told. Working with their stories, we changed the names of the characters when the actors played the situation, and we did not allow people to refer back to the initial situation after we started the forum work. One of them was about the rotational system. The play was improvised like this:

Fritz had taken a place, that according to the rotation system belonged to Carla. Carla wanted her place beside Lisa, and she had the right to go for it. Carla asked Fritz to move to his own place, but he refused. Yesterday he was moved around, away from the place that he should have, so today he had decided to stay.

What should Carla say to Fritz, I asked the audience? In their ideas of what to say to him, they were hostile towards him. Of course, Fritz did not change, and the audience got really angry with him. After a while, I changed the perspective. How did Fritz see the situation? No reaction. I had seen that before in the course of the day, so I dropped this way of working. Instead I asked the audience – what would be the next thing that Carla and Lisa would do?

Chatter about how stupid Fritz was, they said. And next? I asked. Tell somebody else about him, they said. We played that on stage. Somebody would tease him in the canteen, they said – we saw that. What is happening? I asked. No reaction. So what can he do, I asked. He can piss off, somebody said. Nobody tried to protect him.

The actor playing Fritz became sharper in his reactions in the role. I was sticking to an ongoing theme about exclusion, since I had seen harsh exclusion going on so

many times this day. But there was no way Fritz could be a part of the group again. Then one of the newcomers spoke out and said that this was her daily life, not being accepted and being pulled around. Then another said the same, really expressing a different standpoint from that of the dominant opinion.

1.1.2.2 The finale

In the final session, Peter was shocked, and expressed dissatisfaction with his people. He said that he did not want to be a manager for them when they reacted like this. The audience became involved, and some said they felt that the day had focused too much on the negative things. Peter agreed and said that it was not important to focus on all this negative stuff. The production index had risen and indeed everything was going very well. It was not spoken aloud, but I sensed, that we ended in a classic consultant dilemma: Peter agreeing silently with the audience that it was the Dacapo Theatre who had created all the problems.

I was surprised by Peter's way of expressing things, but I did not intervene very much. I had a strong feeling that a well-known pattern had emerged, but also that the outsiders had been doing something new, and that this could be a fragile beginning of difference.

1.1.3 After the job – a conversation with Peter

Following this work Peter was very unhappy and expressed his view that things had regressed back to the way they were before the kanban process. Afterwards I wrote an e-mail and had a telephone conversation with him. He told me it now seemed to be legitimate to mock the engineers as 'nerds'. The engagement that he felt after the kanban change had now dissipated. He said that he did not know whether this was because of our day there or whether it would have happened anyway, but it was not good. In his words:

The actors played a situation, focusing on the conflicts, following proposals from the audience, and nothing changed. We saw a new proposal enacted, and again nothing improved. So what we were left with was the feeling that no matter what we did, it wouldn't help.

I told him that I had tried to focus on the openings, of which I felt that there were many. I referred to a specific situation where I asked for reflections after playing a situation on stage. Five people in turn commented that the situation was exactly the same as before. Then one said that he had seen a change. I had followed up, asking what he had seen and where it had happened, which he was very clear about; but nobody else accepted it. I said that it seemed to me that some of the production people apparently did not want to cease their routine ways of expressing themselves.

I also told him that I had seen several of the newcomers having the courage to say things very clearly, maybe for the first time. I was very interested in what had been going on since, and I asked him whether he felt completely alone with his way of seeing things. He agreed that the newcomers saw things differently and also the white collar people and some staff from the production were remarking on this to him. The engineers and the logistics people also had the strength to see things from the production people's position, which had never been the case before.

Writing this, I become aware that Peter has a different view from mine of how things happen. The ability of conversation to create new and surprisingly different knowledge seemed not to make sense to Peter in the same way it does to me. Consequently, the way he understands what we are doing with the theatre is different, too. The idea that people, while expressing a particular view, might simultaneously be moving towards another way of responding, is not how he thinks. How can I conceptualise this with people to whom paradoxes seem to have been eliminated from their thinking?

I asked him whether he could build on the feeling of not being alone with the wish to change the way they relate. He was very interested. I really felt an opening here in our conversation. But he also expressed that he had inadequate knowledge of these kinds of processes, so he needed an external consultant, and this would not be us.

My only intention was to keep the relationship open, but I felt that he expected me to try to 'sell more of us'. Although I said that it was very important for him to use a consultant he trusted, I did so with mixed feelings, because I knew which consultant he was thinking of. So far her work had focused on how to establish rules for communication, and in groups they had created rules like 'smile a bit more' and 'we need to have the same rules for everybody', which I did not find helpful; but I could not find a way to talk with him about this.

At the end of the conversation, he concluded that the day had enhanced the bad aspects of the company's culture, and that we opened the floodgates for something that we were then unable to control. It had been difficult for him to find a boundary between playing a role and being in the reality, finding it a problem not knowing when to be actor and when to be manager for his own factory, and he advised us to be clearer about that.

Working in the grey zone between fiction and reality had apparently accentuated the problems, or at least that was how he referred to it. We are very aware in our work of keeping a distance between fiction and reality. But we have gradually moved much more into the grey area between them, thinking of our work as improvisation, not only for the actors, but for the participants and myself as well. I do not want to go back to our former practice, but at the same time I cannot know whether or when these adverse consequences might happen again.

1.2 Understanding Organizational Theatre

I will reflect on organizational theatre as described by some researchers, as well as on the theories and work of others who have influenced our ways of working.

1.2.1 Systems thinking of organizational theatre

Others have been using theatre in organizational development, for instance in Germany and France, and a German researcher, Schreyögg (2001) has been doing research in what he calls 'organizational theatre'. He uses four criteria to define this:

- Professional performers stage a play
- The play dramatizes a specific problem faced by the organization
- The play is directed towards a clearly defined audience, e.g. a department or a factory
- The client organization commissions the theatre piece and pays for the production.

1.2.1.1 Is the Dacapo Theatre doing 'organizational theatre' according to Schreyögg's definition?

We agree with the client organization on a theme, we use professional actors and we play theatre for a specified audience. But improvisation is a key element in our work. Even when we present a fixed play, we often work in such a way that the topic or problem is described in the situation and therefore at the same time known and unknown to us as well as to the audience. With regard to working with theatre, Schreyögg says:

Whatever the form, in all cases organizational theatre aims at getting the audience deeply involved and confronting it with hidden conflicts, subconscious behavioural patterns or with painful truths.
(Schreyögg, 2001: 8)

Using systems theory based on Luhmann (1998) he claims that theatre works by bringing in a second order observation, encouraging the spectators to think, 'why

do we do what we do the way we do it?’ when they see a situation on stage that is like their own. He says that the theatre is, however, not just a stimulus bringing a foreseeable result. The members do reflect on the basis of their own cognitive world and on their sense-making mechanisms. Consequently, he sees organizational theatre as a powerful instrument that even can cause damage by exposing people in this emotive way to critical issues without further reflection. So follow-up activities from management are important, he argues.

Behind Schreyögg’s arguments I see the assumption of managing as something outside the process deciding what should happen. The argument is that theatre can uncover the hidden, by introducing reflection. But since theatre works in uncontrollable ways it is important to follow up to ensure a desirable result. So the management have to follow up – since they know what is right and wrong. This is a rationalist way of thinking about change.

I don’t think that change processes are clearly rational, and I think differently about our work with the theatre. The theme is the starting point, not the result. I would not agree to ‘implement’ ideas or values, but rather seek a willingness to use theatre to explore what is going on and encourage conversation. In the example on the previous pages, uncontrolled emotions did occur, and unpredictable things did happen, in a way that may not have been fruitful. The manager did not like it, maybe because he wanted to control the result, and did not like what he perceived as a negative outcome. Maybe he thinks about change in a systemic framework. Maybe he never understood the potential of the improvisational process.

Schreyögg refers to the fact that theatre can do damage – exposing people in an emotionalising way without any further reflection – and he emphasises the importance of adequate follow-up activities. He is not talking about improvisation; for him, organizational theatre is carefully constructed to lead to a specific result. For me, improvisational work is very important. Here the interaction becomes genuine, and the audience becomes involved in a way that creates new possibilities.

But in the unpredictable emergence of the work unpleasant things might happen because of the ambivalence of working between fiction and reality.

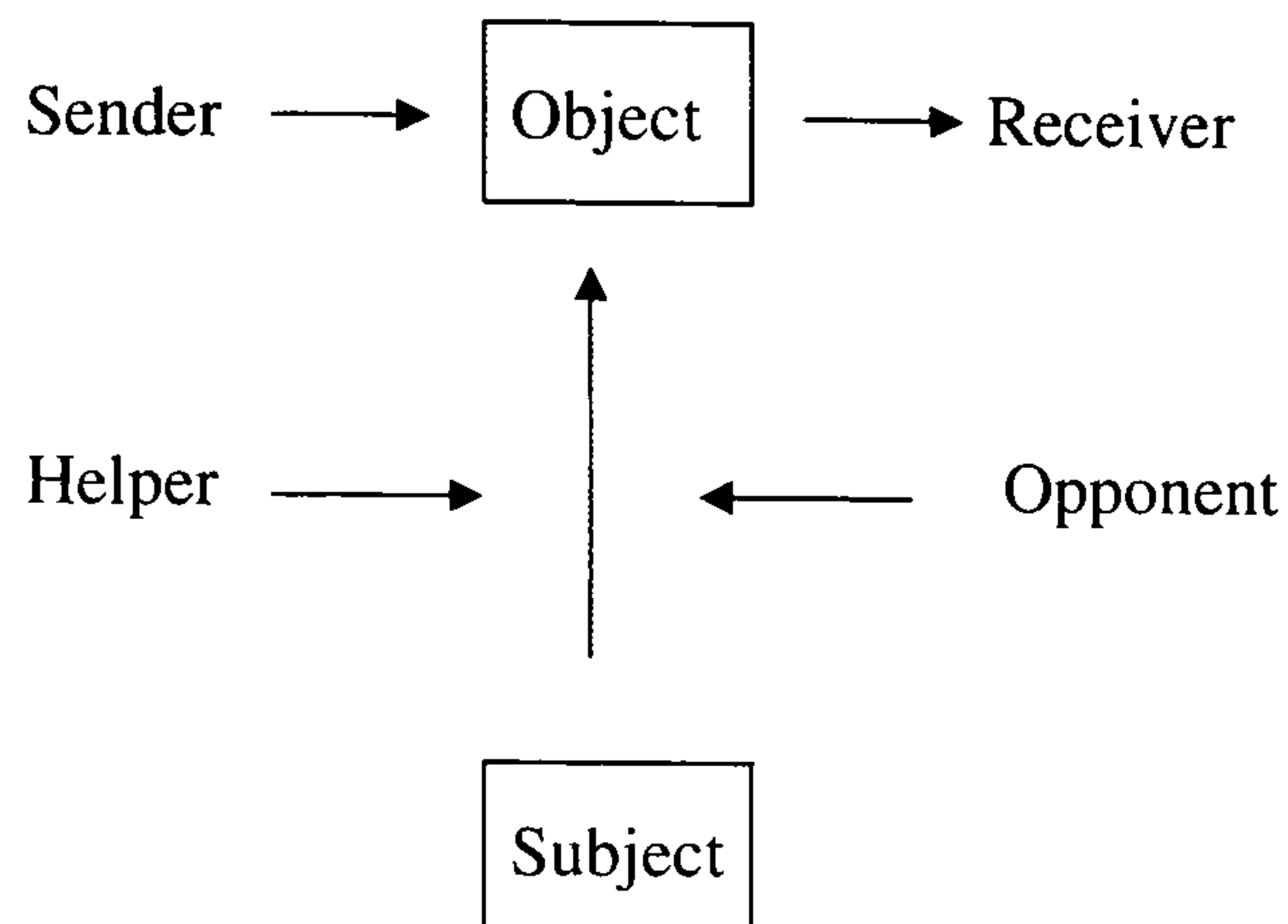
1.2.2 Actants and actors

In theatre, it is important to see an individual role as a part of a drama that the actor can build up a relationship around. In normal drama a conflict is exposed on stage and grows over time until it reaches a culmination as the conflict finds an ending. In forum theatre we start to involve the audience from a point of high tension, and usually most of the audience seek a kind of resolution to the problems, but we cannot anticipate the outcome in advance.

When we build up a scene we usually turn to the actant model (Greimas, [1966] 1974). Greimas was a French structuralist, looking for the ‘grammar of stories’. Several people before him had been analysing folk tales and other narratives for fundamental roles at the level of narrative deep structure, calling them actants. The actants are, according to Greimas, ‘forces’, and they drive the story.

‘Actants are beings or things that participate in processes in any form whatsoever’ (Greimas and Courtés, 1988: 6). Building on the work of other structuralists, who were analysing folk tales and other stories, Greimas invented what he called the actantial model. A character (the subject) wanting something (the object) is expressing an actantial force. The story comes out of the resistance the subject meets and the help that might be expressed. The opponent and the helper are actantial forces. The drama ends when the sender gives what is needed for the subject to fulfil the goal. The receiver is the one who benefits from the situation: it might be the subject, or it might be others.

Greimas operates with actants and actors, the latter being characters that might express actants, even different actants in different parts of the story.



When we create a play, whether it is prepared in advance or is improvised, we use the same model for questioning. Who is the subject? What does the subject want? Who are the opponents, as the subject sees it? Are there any helpers? But we do not know about senders or receivers, as ideas about this are emerging during the play.

The actantial model is designed to analyse a text or a drama once it has already been written. We use it completely differently, namely as a tool to understand the relationships between the actors and for giving a focus to the work with the audience. We focus on the subject – to begin with. When we change the perspective, we are placing one of the other characters, for instance the one expressing the opponent actantial force in the role of the subject. What is his object?; Who does he see as an opponent?; and so on. This model helps us to set up a situation very quickly.

In this model, the object expresses the intention of the subject. But these intentions change as we work. However, the model does not allow for any such change and I have come to see this as an inherent problem.

1.2.2.1 Negative implications of using the actantial model

The very nature of improvisation is that things can change, but maybe the actantial model sometimes blocks us from seeing that the intention of the subject might change. We talk about the ‘resistance’ the actors should offer. What kind of ‘resis-

tance' is adequate towards the opponent actor or towards someone from the audience playing that role? When should the actor 'give less resistance'? Being asked by actors I remember feeling puzzled by the question, and I now see that in the question lies an assumption of a specific direction of playing. I like to be surprised by the actors, and at the same time I know that not all kinds of resistance will work. The phrase 'challenge' had been introduced instead of resistance. This makes a lot of sense to me because it allows for a change in the direction of playing the relationship.

What are the implications of the actantial model for me as a consultant? Maybe I also keep people at the same task, even when it is changing, because I am so focused on the intention I think we are working on that I fail to be aware of some changes – however minor and subtle – that are emerging? There is an important paradox here. Conflict is so important for doing theatre, but maybe the way we understand and work with conflict needs to be given some thought. The actantial model frames conflict as a result of opposing forces. Change has a hard time here, waiting for 'The Sender'. If we focus more on the dynamics – such as the shifting, enabling and constraining incidents that occur in the web of conversation – then perhaps our way of working with the conflict will change. This leads me to an exploration of the roots of forum theatre.

1.2.3 The roots of forum theatre

Forum theatre was invented by Augusto Boal ([1979] 2000). He used this way of working in Brazil, and later all over the world, especially in Europe.

In Boal's forum theatre the actors rehearse and play a situation that shows a problem: Boal calls this an anti-model. The problem has no known or easy solution, and the audience – the spect-actors – become involved in finding ways out of it. Boal calls this the Theatre of the Oppressed. One person is oppressing another. This power inequality makes it difficult for the oppressed to respond, so the dialogue becomes a monologue. The oppressor makes himself a subject, forcing the other into the role as an object. Boal finds, that this relation is always authoritative

and paralysing and that it ought to be destroyed wherever found (Boal, [1980] 1985: 15). This indicates a clear mission behind the theatre of the oppressed. By giving the oppressed opportunities for finding words and action, the oppression will be changed. There are clear traces back to the Marxist tradition in this discourse, although Boal talks about all kinds of oppression, it could be men's oppression of women, or adults' oppression of children.

1.2.3.1 Theatre of the oppressed

Over the last few years, I have become increasingly aware of problems with this way of thinking. Often new things emerge on stage, for instance when someone from the audience goes on stage. Often the conversation has changed the problem, or has opened the field for the problem to change. But if the actor is constantly looking for another way of giving resistance to the change, and if the joker³ is only asking about the intention that was initially presented, an unpredictable change in the conversation is not appreciated.

When Boal works, he works only with the oppressed. He does not want to work with all audiences, since some are oppressors and some are the oppressed.

The Dacapo Theatre has, over the years, tried to contact Boal. In Spring 2002 he answered us by e-mail:

Please, understand me. *Theatre of the Oppressed is theatre of the oppressed, for the oppressed and by the oppressed.* I know that social and labour conditions in Brazil and in Denmark are very, very different, so it is difficult for me to imagine what words like managers, executives, Bang & Olufsen, business, etc., really mean to you. I know what they mean to me.

He did not accept an invitation to visit us, since the Dacapo Theatre was working for what he would term the 'oppressors'.

Boal talks about the oppressed in 'we' terms: it is possible to adjudicate who are the oppressed. In Latin America, the problems were usually very specific and straightforward: it was easy for the audience to sense and obtain a 'we' situation,

³ Boal's term for the consultant that works together with actors

with a sense of universal validity in the audience – for instance, the people from a poor area finding the police oppressive. When Boal came to Europe he found the themes more ‘psychological’, in which it was not always easy to find the ‘we’ feeling. This did not change his basic way of thinking, but he developed a psychological approach, talking about ‘cop in the head’ meaning that the oppression had become internalised.

1.2.3.2 How does our work differ from Boal’s forum theatre?

In our work with theatre, we do not use the phrase ‘theatre of the oppressed’. It might be simply that the rhetoric has changed since the seventies, but I do think that there are significant differences in the concepts. Usually we construct dramatic situations in a frame that is close to Boal’s way of working. We see the situation from a specific perspective, the actantial subject, which is usually made clear in the play by the actors and by the joker. This is very much alike Boal’s work.

When we in theatre takes a clear perspective for a moment it becomes possible for people to understand much more of what is going on; drama opens up new conversations, because people can identify with the subject and therefore usually people can accept that there are ‘good reasons’ for the subject, even if they do not agree.

When we work the actors try to enact the other characters, especially the people acting out the resistance, in such a way that the audience can see them as humans with intentions that may be different from their own, but are nevertheless understandable. If some of the audience express dissociation or disgust with one of the characters, we would switch to the perspective of this character after a while.

What is he up to, how would he argue for what he does? If he becomes the subject, what does he want, and what kind of resistance does he see? So we frequently change the perspectives of what we are working with, but only after having explored this perspective. When it works well, people in the audience become more aware of the differences; they might become more curious about the other’s

intentions, without necessarily abandoning their own. I see this as different from Boal, because we do not solely work with one perspective.

1.2.3.3 What does Boal think of the role of the joker?

As mentioned above, Boal works from the 'we' perspective. He says that the joker should bring doubt and questions to the audience, but from the point of view that there is a common 'we' in the audience that collectively feels the oppression. I find that in the Boal tradition, the situation on stage is static. His focus leads to a special way of questioning for the joker that keeps the situation static, until suddenly the original situation is changed. In this tradition I could follow up on someone from the audience who went on stage: 'Did you succeed with your intention?' Usually they would say 'no', and we could go on to the next proposal. Others could try, but with this kind of framing the discussion keeps the formulation of the problem from moving. Also, the actors are focusing on the resistance they offer. For Boal this is a help to the oppressed, giving them an opportunity to test their ideas in a safe way on stage, but it keeps the situation static. When the actor sticks to the role – apparently not willing to change – it is hard to accept the minor changes that might happen, which might be interesting to follow.

Boal calls what he is doing 'sociodrama', as distinct from 'psychodrama'. In psychodrama, the focus is on the individual ('I'), while in sociodrama the focus is on 'we'. For Boal there is a distinction between the joker and the therapist. The therapist is a specialist, obtaining an authority he cannot avoid, because the patient would place him in that role even if he wanted to eliminate it. On the contrary, the joker is only asking. He does not know any more than anybody else, and he could be replaced by anybody, Boal says. The ideal joker for Boal is Socratic, i.e. just asking questions.

I think that Boal is not fully aware of his relationship with the audience here. The joker has a relationship with the audience, where they create his role as much as he does himself, and the audience can place him in a role just as the individual does with the therapist. I think, contrary to the way Boal expresses it, that the joker has intentions that come into action during the work. As a joker, I change

my understanding of what is going on as some of the spectators react to me, if I dare to listen. This might lead to new situations to work with.

1.2.3.4 The illusion of the joker as neutral

Boal mentions that the joker helps the audience to give birth to the ideas they have in their heads, and should not try to force ideas onto them that they do not have (Boal, [1980] 1985: 142). This assumes that the ideas are already there, just waiting to be born by some of those in the audience. If forum theatre succeeds in encouraging the audience to find ways to break the oppression, the problem disappears.

I think that the joker is a part of the process, having intentions that are influenced by the situation and the audience. But the joker is also formed by the responses and intentions expressed by audience and actors alike. As the joker, I encourage the audience to speak out about differences among them. I can ask the question: ‘What is going on?’ and again and again I find myself – usually together with the audience – surprised by the diversity of ways in which a situation can be perceived and understood. I do not see myself as giving birth to ideas that have already been conceived. Creating a narrative on stage involves a process where ideas from the audience interweave with ideas and action from the involved actors – and the joker as well – which combine to create novel situations. I view ‘Theatrical improvisation’ as an appropriate way to describe what we are doing.

1.2.4 Improvisation

Theatre improvisation is the key element in the actors’ work when we use theatre. When improvising they concentrate on responding to each other, and in this sense they do not act so much as *react* in the actual moment. Keith Johnstone has been working with theatre improvisation for many years, and has written the book *Impro* (Johnstone, 1981). He has had a huge influence on Danish theatre because for many years he was a teacher at a Danish theatre school. He invented ‘theatre sport’, where the actors go on stage without knowing anything about what to do.

Johnstone says that we are all afraid to change in real life, so it is exciting to see on stage. He realised that it is difficult for actors to leave the stage, therefore he exercises that with actors. He places two actors on a bench, and wants them to leave for the same reason. At first lots of proposals come from one actor, and the others do not respond. He tells them not to speak and repeats the situation. Later he tells them not to propose an idea, but just to respond to the proposals they get. When they begin to react on what they see, a theme emerges between them and suddenly they are able to leave (Johnstone, 1997: 135). To do this as an actor, being 'present' is important, by this Johnstone means awareness of what is going on and readiness to respond without hesitation.

1.2.4.1 Reacting instead of acting

I see a movement in the way Johnstone understands improvisation. In 1979 he works with what blocks spontaneity in the individual. He tells the story about a short film he produced. Two happy cripples stand behind a corner. When a person comes around the corner they beat him to a cripple. In the last scene three happy cripples stand behind the corner, waiting for the next. This process of crippling each other is what he thinks we are doing to each other every day, and as a result the fear of being perceived psychotic, obscene or not original enough prevents people from reacting spontaneously.

In the latter book he concentrates more on improvisation as a relational matter, and he compares theatre with tennis. The audience are waiting to see how the serve is picked up (Johnstone, 1997: 61).

I have twice experienced Keith Johnstone's way of working, and the Dacapo Theatre has been doing impro training with people from companies, for instance working with creativity or management. When you are a part of the audience it is striking to see that offers made by one actor on stage are often refused by the others. But when you are on stage with an audience staring at you, it becomes difficult to notice these offers.

1.2.4.2 Improvisation makes a difference

This is a completely different way of understanding our work with theatre than the actantial or Boal's way of understanding forum theatre and the role of the theatre. Improvisation has had a considerable influence on the way we think of our work in the Dacapo Theatre, but we need to develop the way we use theatre in organizational change processes: going further into a process where we think and talk about improvisation is not just something that is happening for the actors in certain predefined situations, but for the consultant and the participants as well, all the time.

In the book *Complex Responsive Processes*, Stacey (2002) explores George Herbert Mead's theory of evolution of mind, self and society using insights and analogies from complexity science. Mead is talking about gesture–response in the social act. Meaning is explained not as something located in the past or in the future, but as something that emerges in what is called the endless gesture and response patterns. The endless flow of gesture–response actions do repeat the past, but at the same time open possibilities for change in an unpredictable way.

Patricia Shaw has introduced an analogy of thinking of organizational change as ensemble improvisation (Shaw, 2002). It has emerged partly out of her work with the Dacapo Theatre and from a workshop including Keith Johnstone with the themes of improvisation, creativity and complexity. Inevitably this will be influencing the way I think of improvisation in our work, and it will influence my subsequent writing also.

1.3 Reflections on re-reading project one

The theme that I can see in this project, that in its own way continues over the whole thesis, is around participating in conversation, taking into consideration the sustaining power configurations and searching for ways to encourage people to spontaneously participate in the emerging conversation. By 'participation' I mean direct interaction with other people; as mentioned by Stacey; this is not the way participation is understood in cybernetic systems thinking terms – here participa-

tion means to participate in creating a whole outside the direct experience of interaction (Stacey, 2003a: 416). The critique I present of Schreyögg's understanding of organizational theatre is the first attempt in writing to address my critique of systems thinking. This continues in the next projects.

Re-reading the narrative is a powerful experience. Apparently the manager perceives the conflict and tension that arose as solely destructive, an approach that I cannot see as anything other than avoiding the problems. Writing about it became important, because it resonates with the way I have come to understand movement of thought as a dialectical process; when the tension that arises in a story like this conflicts with explanations that cannot account for the experience, the potential arises for new ways of thinking. Working with this narrative came to influence my way of reflecting on how I find myself meeting people in discourses different from mine, and this in turn became a main theme in project three. The theme of fiction and reality that Peter raises also becomes key in this thesis: in project four I explore thinking of fiction and reality in our work as a paradox, which is different from understanding our work as going on in a grey zone between fiction and reality.

In the later projects and in the synopsis I will see conversation as transformational in itself, not guided by an overlaying purpose. My critique of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed and the role of the joker links well with this. However, I will admit that the praxis of forum theatre has a potential that goes far beyond Boal's own theory – I will return to this in the synopsis.

At the time I wrote the project, in our company the actant model was seen as key when we created improvised scenes. Doing the critique was highly anxiety-provoking, because it seemed as though nothing was left. However, in the critique of this lies more than pure deconstruction: it resonates with the understanding of process that will follow in the next projects – and in the synopsis.

2 Power and spontaneity in movement, Project Two, April 2003

2.1 Prologue

‘So let us introduce ourselves to each other at the tables’, I said to the audience. A man who was sitting with his wife at my table started to talk about their two children. Although all was well now, a few years ago the social workers had wanted to remove their children. He and his wife had sought help from social workers to deal with their very difficult children but they and the social workers had formed a very bad relationship. As a result, after three years, the social workers decided to take the children into care. The man had gone to the press and finally they were allowed to change to another institution and new social workers. Within a year, they were helped so much that they were able to deal with their children without any help from ‘the system’. He also mentioned that he himself had been in a children’s home for 17 years. He felt that this had been used against him in this situation.

This conversation took place at a meeting in the initial phase of a research project about user involvement in the social services and the legal rights of the citizen. This particular day was about the contact of parents with ‘the system’. The participants at this meeting were social workers, foster parents and assessors, and also parents who had either lost, or come close to losing, their children. We were supposed to work with the participants as an alternative to the widely used ‘focus group’ interviews. The idea was that by dramatising some aspects of people’s stories we could uncover issues that would not come out in interviews. No one in the room had ever tried this before, and I felt anxious and tense but at the same time an intense desire to find a way to explore the theme: How do we understand client involvement and legal rights?

We had split into three groups. While the man was talking I could see that the other groups were finishing their round. My colleagues and I had a plan but I felt drawn into the man's story. So I called the actors, who were sitting at the other tables. I expressed that I would like to see performed on stage the story of what the 'good' social workers had been doing and I asked the man to say something about it. He hesitated, 'We were just sitting there, and they appreciated us and helped us be parents'. 'What did they do?' I asked. He could not explain. 'What were you doing?' I asked. 'Well, we played some games with the children', was his reply. Obviously the man could not explain his relationship with the social worker, but we set up a situation with three actors, one playing the nine-year-old child who was very noisy and challenging, one playing the father and one playing the social worker.

Usually the man would direct the actors, but obviously he was not able to do that. The actors had not heard his story from the beginning and they were confused. I sensed that we all felt that this was risky. The actors started playing cards and after a while I stopped them; the actor playing the kid had been really challenging in his role. 'What was different?' I asked the man. 'The kid is OK', he said, 'and the father is OK too, sitting not knowing what to say to the child. But the social worker is wrong. She just observed and did not take part in the play. It was taken on video, and afterwards we watched it together and talked about what I could do.' The man's speech was nearly fluent now.

The actors played again, now with the 'social worker' watching. At a moment when the child was behaving really badly the 'father' took a glance at the 'social worker', she smiled and kept quiet. 'Yes, this is good', the man said. 'It is just the way it was when he ('the father') looks at her ('the social worker'), and she sits there and just smiles. I really remember it and it gave me the confidence to calm down and not to be angry about the child's restlessness. We worked with this and gradually I learned how to relate to the boy'. He spoke more and more, talking fluently in a much richer language.

‘Didn’t she take notes?’ asked a member of the audience. ‘No’, he said. ‘There was a large board and she could write on that. In the beginning it distracted me but after a few sessions it did not disturb me. We could talk about it afterwards, and because what she wrote was visible on the board, I never felt that she had a hidden agenda’. Another member of the audience commented that what she had seen on stage was not a good situation because no limits were set for the boy and that should not be allowed. The man replied that basically she was right, but first of all he, as a father, had to find a way to be there and cope with the situation and that was just what came out of the relation to the social worker. He explained that just by having her there and being inspired by her reactions, he found his own way of reacting and not reacting in the situation with his children. ‘After some months the situation changed, and within a year we did not need help any more’, he said.

2.2 The theme of this project

In August 2002 I phrased my enquiry to be about **using theatre** as a **consulting practice**, focusing on **improvisation** as a way of working with the **emergence of spontaneity** and **power**. This is half a year later, and I will be taking these themes as key elements in exploring the narrative just described.

One could say that dramatising the situation simply worked - as an illustration richer than words. The work we were doing by playing the situation helped the man to find his words. However, I do not think we were merely digging up knowledge that was already located somewhere in the head of this man. In a work on how to understand change, Stacey, Griffin and Shaw draw on a classical discussion in philosophy about what is called teleology – the reason why things happen (Stacey et al., 2000). Here they pinpoint differences between formative teleology – saying that ‘it is all there’, you just have to discover it – and transformative teleology, which claims that the future – as well as our anticipation of the past – exists only because we are forming it in the present, and therefore paradoxically transforming it at the same time.

Knowing is (...) an act of recognition. Communication here is a movement from and toward an as yet unrecognised position that

comes to be recognized (known) in the act of communication itself.
That recognition may sustain or shift the communicants' identities.
All communication carries the possibility of change.

(Stacey et al., 2000: 34)

Everyone in the room was engaging animatedly in what was going on; we were moving into a conversation that was at the very heart of the theme we were working with, and we were processing it together, in iterations of talking and playing. The actors contributed with experiences that were in the fullest sense embodied and emotional. They reiterated these situations by playing them again, taking the momentary conversation into consideration. So through iterating and reiterating in different ways we were all working with the theme of the day. In this way, the man was drawn into a new conversation that gave him an insight that was novel just as the situation was novel. What happened affected the situation about the theme we were working with and its progress towards a way of understanding, which had not been understood – or understood in a different way – previously.

2.2.1.1 Reflecting about my 'consultancy practice'

Obviously I did not know what would happen. We had a theme to work with, but although this gave direction to what we were doing, I was improvising as much as the actors were. At the same time we were using our skills to create situations that could facilitate meaningful conversations about the theme of the day. Playing the situation led to further conversation, and thereby contributed to a shift.

I was scared as well as the actors, and the man who told the story definitely was, too. I do find myself having discussions with the actors about not being sufficiently prepared for meeting with clients, but perhaps sometimes it is a way of talking about the theme of anxiety. I think that my identity as a consultant emerges out of situations like this and is paradoxically confirmed and changed at the same time. In this situation, I came to think that an important part of my work was daring to run a risk, the risk of taking an unknown step. Consequently there is endless negotiation with actors and clients that partly reflects the theme: How to deal with anxiety so that we dare to take the next step together, a step that might

seem risky but that might bring about a shift in situations such as the one in the prologue?

Because theatre is closely interwoven with my practice as a consultant, I will talk and write about my consultancy practice from within that experience⁴. What emerged in the situation was a conversation about involvement of clients. It was not an abstract discussion, but about making sense of the specific situation we were working with, involving everyone. We concentrated on the moment of the meeting this man had with the social worker, and by staying with this something emerged in the present.

In their work about teleology, Stacey, Griffin and Shaw mention how different teleologies focus on different ways of thinking of time. Formative teleology implies a linear movement from the past to the present, since it all is there to be unfolded. Rationalist teleology implies a movement from what you design for the 'new' future to the present - but this too is linear. Transformative thinking implies a non-linear understanding of time, since the future and the past are constructed again and again in the present through our sense-making.

One might think of a macro-temporal structure of the present, which has a micro-past, micro-present and micro-future, a kind of fractal process. That micro-temporal structure is the gesture and the response the gesture calls forth, taken together. The here-and-now, then, has a circular temporal structure because the gesture takes its meaning from the response (micro-future) which only has meaning in relation to the gesture (the micro-past), and the response in turn acts back to potentially change the gesture (micro-past). The experience of meaning is occurring in the micro-present and it accounts for the fact that we can experience presentness. What is happening here is truly paradoxical, for the future is changing the past just as the past is changing the future.

(Stacey et al., 2000: 35)

⁴ In the theme of inquiry I introduce the phrase 'using theatre'. One could argue that this was what happened in the situation, that we 'used' theatre in the situation. The word 'using' implies that theatre is a tool, a 'thing' that can be implemented in practice, perhaps demonstrating a desired outcome by following a script. Instead I would say that we introduce theatre as a contribution to conversation, by improvising.

Emergence is what is going on in the movement from within the present situation. As I am a part of what is going on I can only participate from within and from being in that present situation. However, I find it extremely difficult to talk about this in Danish, which is my mother tongue, since we do not have a word for emergence. We use words like 'new' and 'appearance' to talk about what comes forth, or 'birth' and 'origin' to focus on where it came from. Similarly, in the Danish language we very rarely use the verbal conjugation that describes ourselves being in the middle of something, the gerund. Only if physical movement is involved (running, walking, standing) do we use it; we do not use words like conversing, thinking, relating. Consequently, in my conversation with others I find it extremely difficult to stimulate lively discussion about this.

2.2.1.2 Spontaneity

In a work about conversation in organizations, Shaw links spontaneity to the intention to stay with the situation while simultaneously working with the movement of the 'here and now' situation (Shaw, 2002: 157). This makes sense in relation to the prologue. When the man told his story, I sensed that we needed to work with it immediately. We had intentions for how the day could work out, but the outcome emerged in the interweaving of our intentions and the intentions and stories that people brought in. But repeating the story, and at the same time changing it, was influencing our first intentions. I think that we all learned a lot about client involvement in the situation, and this learning was novel to everybody. It was possible because together we ran a risk of some kind of spontaneity, so opening the possibility of an outcome that none of us could have predicted.

2.2.1.3 The role of power

If spontaneity is about liveliness, about being 'present' – what affects spontaneity? I see power as a ubiquitous aspect of relating processes between humans. In the situation in the prologue, I was in a position to decide to work with the situation I had just heard of. The actors did what I asked them to do. This constrained the actors and me as well, but at the same time it enabled us to do what we did. The actors were confused when they experienced that the man was unable to direct them. Without the power relation between us, they might have wanted to

move on to another situation. The situation became rewarding because the actor playing the child dared to play it as he imagined it would be – drawing upon his own experiences of relating to another child; however, the power relation to myself or to some members of the audience might have prevented this spontaneity.

At the moment I am struggling with how to understand power relations, moving away from an understanding that would consider it important to balance and equalise ‘the power’. Furthermore, I am interested in understanding the relations between spontaneity and power in the work we are doing, which will become a theme of this project. I will start with exploring how we can recognise themes that change in the process of its development.

2.2.2 ‘Openings’ in relation to a different way of understanding time

In my first project I described a situation where the audience focused on the patterns of interaction in the play, not recognising the potential for change that I could see in the situations we were working with. I concluded that the thinking about forum theatre we have from Boal and the actant model could be drawing attention to a static recognition of existing patterns, rather than allowing the problem to move away from the initial paradox. Shortly after this, we worked at a meeting for shop stewards and safety reps for the white-collar TUC in Copenhagen – 180 people from the finance sector, hospitals and nursing, and public administration. The audience produced this story that took place in the nursing sector. To reduce the risk of injury, the employees were allowed to handle disabled patients only when two people were present, or with adequate equipment. A nurse, George, handled a newly arrived patient, a mentally retarded and physically disabled woman, alone. She was very satisfied with the way he had handled her, but he had broken the rules. Two other employees, Ann and Peter, wanted to follow the rules, and later when they tried to handle the patient together, she became angry, hit out at them, cried out and asked for George. Ann and Peter went to George. They were angry. ‘Who do you think you are? You have to follow the rules’, they said.

The actors played this situation. On stage the client fell out of her chair while they were arguing, and the situation ended up with George pushing the others away, caring for the patient himself. I stopped the play, asking the audience what was going on. Most of them were angry with George, saying that he had to follow the rules. Their argument followed these lines: ‘It is so difficult to establish rules like this, so we have to follow them’, and ‘Maybe George can stand it – at least for a while, but what about Ann (played by a tiny actor)?’ – and ‘George is not taking safety seriously’. Then one said, ‘This is too much: be human, think of the patient, George is doing a good job’. Most of the audience immediately booed, but others supported her.

I could have focused on the differences in these perspectives, making room for each view with questions like:

- ‘What are the good reasons for George to do what he does?’
- ‘Why do Peter and Ann become angry?’
- ‘Why does the client react like she does?’

Then I might have asked someone from the audience what they would do. He or she could go to the stage to try it out. Afterwards I could ask the audience what happened. I could end up asking the new participant, ‘Did you succeed with your intention?’ Usually they would then say ‘no’, and we could try again. It is easy to see how this might work as an invitation to define the overall patterns, to draw a kind of map instead of focusing on the potential for some kind of dynamic shift. The consultant invites a reflective approach that Bateson (1979) calls ‘meta-talk’, which discloses the patterns underlying a situation by talking in another language, by changing ‘levels’. In a later section I will examine this way of thinking further. However, it is obvious that this analysis, however useful in understanding a situation, does not immediately lead to change.

2.2.2.1 *Encouraging awareness*

Reading Stacey's (2001) discussion of Mead (1934) inspired me to go in another direction. In working on stage with a theme, one is setting up endless new situations where we can experience

...continuous spontaneous action in which patterns of action are continuously reproduced in repetitive forms as continuity, sameness and identity, and simultaneously as potential transformation of change.
(Stacey, 2001: 89)

After the experience described in Project One, I had been thinking about how I could talk in a way that would encourage people to notice what might emerge in the improvised conversations. I said something like this to the audience: 'Every time we have a conversation here on stage, the pattern we have just seen in the play is in some way reproduced from the last time the actors spoke to each other. So we could focus on the repetition of the pattern, and I will encourage you to speak out when you see that. But at the same time, you might notice a difference, an opening for a change of some kind. It might be small and you might perceive it differently from each other. Some might think that it opens up opportunities, while others might think that it closes them down. I will also invite you to speak out when you see this happen.'

This evening was the first time I worked with this idea. Now a woman from the audience, who was on George's side, said that he needed some support on stage. So she went to the stage as the shop steward and talked with Ann, Peter and George. I did not expect much from this. Most of the audience were booing when she proposed it, and she spoke to Ann and Peter in a preaching manner. Of course, they challenged her. Then suddenly she said something like: 'Peter, would you be willing to try to do the work with the patient together with George?' She asked the question directly and looked into his eyes. 'Yes', Peter said, 'no problem'. I think that he was a bit surprised. 'Do you have any problem with that, George?', she then asked. 'No – fine for me', George replied'. I stopped them, and asked what was going on here.

Several people from the audience noticed that this was interesting. Out of the conversation a situation had emerged that made it possible for Peter and George to relate in a way that had not been possible before. Since the patient felt safe with George, something new might emerge also in that relation. Some people in the audience said that things would get worse, because the theme was no longer health and safety. But most of the others saw that something genuinely new might emerge.

I asked her how she got this idea. She said that it came out of the situation. Standing there with nothing happening, she saw that Peter did relate to George, while Ann did not. So she had seen some communication, not knowing what it was, but it had inspired her. The actors could have given resistance, the audience could have said that nothing really happened, I could have focused on her initial intention, but here something new emerged and many from the audience recognised it, and thus more emerged. This really became a change. A discussion started about relations with patients as well as among the employees. The conflict between the people supporting George and those supporting Ann and Peter did not disappear, but it did turn into other kinds of discussion; a shift was taking place.

2.2.2.2 The connotation of 'openings'

I have come to question the notion of 'openings'. My intention was to draw attention to the improvisational nature of what happens, recognising that it is genuine and creative, as well as destructive. But the notion of 'opening' might suggest that it is possible to glimpse a completely alternative world, with an almost visible path leading into it. What I am trying to encourage is a heightened awareness – which I frequently perceive – of a sense of opportunity that might have emerged in the actual moment. It is fragmentary, and might change again very quickly as the spontaneous action continues, it could turn out to be insignificant, or it might lead on to something important; this cannot be predicted. I am talking about a kind of difference in the conversation, perhaps something surprising, or a kind of 'presence' and engagement that emerges between the people talking. Some people might notice this before others.

The present moment becomes extremely important here, as does the understanding of time. On the basis of Mead ([1932] 2002), (1934), Stacey (2001) and Griffin (2002) understand time as a circular relation between the past, the present and the future, which is always perceived as present. As interaction takes place in the present as continuous iteration, the past is reproduced, but not necessarily in the same way; thus it is transformed as the process of its expression. Small differences might be amplified, resulting in the ideas of the future being changed along with the forming nature of the past.

I believe that what I am trying to describe as ‘openings’, are what Stacey et al. talk about as small differences that might be amplified. It is obvious that the non-linearity of time has an important meaning in the situation I have just described. The potential for change emerged at the most surprising moment, where I thought that the most predictable pattern was bound to be repeated.

Others work with a completely different way of understanding time. Bateson (1979), who has had a significant role in the development of systems thinking, also pays attention to time in understanding what he calls ‘feedback mechanisms’. He perceives time as ‘circular’ in the sense of feedback, which is in effect linear. This has become the dominant, common understanding of time structure. As Griffin puts it, in cybernetic systems thinking:

The past is factually given because it has already happened and the future is ahead, waiting to be unfolded.

(Griffin, 2002: 206)

He continues:

In the perspective of participative self-organization, the present itself has a time structure. The past is not factually given because it is reconstructed in the present as the basis of the action to be taken in the present. The past is what we re-member. The future is also in the present in the form anticipation and expectation.

(Ibid: 206-7)

The word 're-member' argues for the continuous iteration in the present of the past, but implicit in this is that we actively remember in the present; hence, the very act of memory works with the differences and the potential for transformation.

2.3 Movement – in understanding spontaneity and power

Every moment is a new situation, an opening with small changes introduced by spontaneity while we are also repeating patterns. In the following I will focus on what for seems to be interdependency between power relations and spontaneity. I will reflect on a situation that involved several relations of huge importance for me.

'May I ask if we could show some of the same conflict with fewer actors?', I ask. The facilitator of the learning set that we are working with is explaining the situation we are going to play. In fact I know the answer. 'No, it would reduce the complexity too much – it would not be the same', says the facilitator. The others nod.

Another learning set had run into trouble, and one of the participants had encouraged the group to work with it through theatre. Preben, my colleague, was a part of this learning set. Beside me eight people were in the room, five of them directly a part of the learning set and involved in the difficult and painful situation being portrayed. Although we had formally not started with the drama, we were at the same time right in the middle of it, namely the drama of agreeing to work with the situation, negotiating whether to take risks without knowing what would happen.

The facilitator hesitates, but accepts that it might be possible to sense what the situation is about with only four on stage. The facilitator continues by telling about the situation: 'So we are sitting in the library and I intend to confirm the dates we have agreed to meet'. One asks whether it would be possible to change one of dates, another moans about it and they get into a quarrel, the two other in the group say nothing. After a while the proposal is accepted, although the

'moaner' is still angry. As the facilitator of the learning set tells her version of the story, I feel the anxiety rising in the group. The one who had suggested another date interrupts, 'This is not my story.'

I know of this anxiety, but at the same time it is distinctively different. 'What we will do is play a version of the story', I said. 'It is not a kind of truth, whatever that might be. We are working with the way the facilitator saw it; she is the director right now. Afterwards we can shift the perspective to how one of you would explain the situation'. Their shoulders lowered a bit.

2.3.1.1 Bodily response in conversation

'Can you identify with any of the characters we have heard about?', I asked the three people that were not part of the group. The roles of the one suggesting, one quarrelling and one being quiet were immediately taken. Preben played the supervisor, and very quickly they got into a realistic play. Within a minute the audience (who were all part of the original learning set) was laughing, the kind of laugh that comes when you can recognise the situation and yourself in what happens. This was a shift – an opening. The reason for accepting to work with this situation had until now been more or less an intellectual decision, but now a new kind of curiosity emerged that made the situation much more robust.

The shift emerged in a kind of resonance among the people in the room. I sensed it as primarily a physical act that happened before any word was said. With reference to Stern (1985) and Damasio (2000) Stacey (2003b: 103) explores the exchange of symbols, in this context the change in the bodily excitement and rhythm of the actors and audience. When one relaxes, one cannot hold back a smile or breathe differently. This type of gesture evokes a response from other people in the room, a response that immediately iterates new gestures, which in turn call forth new responses from others as well as from themselves. This iteration and reiteration happens at lightning speed, so even before I could express it with words I would be aware that something had happened.

I had much attention at the group the play was about, they were now the audience; but also on Preben, who had a particularly difficult job as the only professional actor, but at the same time he was deeply involved in two ways: being a part of the play in role, while simultaneously being a part of the group the play was about. At this moment I could sense a change in all of them, by sensing a change in my own physical reaction.

I asked the spectators to reflect upon what they had seen. In their responses, they quickly realised that in their group they were reiterating a very well-known pattern in their reaction to each other. The idea emerged to stay a little longer with this pattern, playing it out on stage. We changed the way of working several times. Now that we were working at reiterating the pattern, the spectators were allowed to go on stage taking roles of one of other in the group. Gradually also other ways of taking the role of others were introduced, one went on stage in the role of one usually saying nothing, but now taking much more initiative than this individual usually did. Immediately the whole group focused on him, and it became a theme for discussion whether this was a pattern in the group: to focus on the one taking initiative.

From the first play until now, what was going on had been extremely alive and the time had flown away. We had all been in an intense conversation about what was going on, primarily with the focus on how to move forward. Ideas of what to do came from everywhere, and it was easy for me to follow them, either by accepting them or by commenting on them in a way that created a further movement.

We ended by allowing people from the group to take their own roles on stage, and gradually the people on stage became the original group. Little by little, a profound change happened on stage. The bodily movement was much more subdued, voices were lowered, responses to each other became slower and words were more considered. Why did that happen?

2.3.1.2 *Power and spontaneity*

I think that the element of fiction and the distance that it creates enables an opportunity to play with the situation. It is fiction and at the same time it is real. When the group that offered the situation was back on stage, the elements of fiction faded away for the players and so did the opportunities to play with it. This dramatically enhanced the risk-taking for the players.

How is power linked to this change, and to spontaneity?

Power figurations are then profoundly historical, social, local communicative processes in which our activities simultaneously perpetuate and potentially transform the patterns, which sustain and evolve our joint capacities to act in some ways rather than others. What is more, although each of us may be developing political intentions, consciously making bids to influence the course of events etc., shifts in power figurations occur spontaneously and unpredictably beyond the control of any one party or group, as the nature of all self-organizing processes.

(Shaw, 2002: 73-4)

What Patricia Shaw is drawing attention to here is a way of understanding power relations as ever present, always a part of relations between humans and always constraining and enabling opportunities, abilities, emergence and transformation. This way of thinking builds partly on Norbert Elias (1998). He is focusing on the dynamics of relations: he called himself a process sociologist and is working with what he calls *power figurations*. For Elias, power becomes a theme about inclusion and exclusion, including and excluding, being included and being excluded. Does somebody 'belong' or do they not?

About power, Elias says:

Power is not an amulet possessed by one person and not by another; it is a structural characteristic of human relationship – of all human relationships.

(Elias, 1998: 116)

Elias then sees power not as a 'thing', but as a relation. From the day of its birth, a baby has power over its parents, not just the parents over the baby. At least, the baby has power over them as long as they attach any kind of value to it. If not, it

loses its power. The parents may abandon the baby if it cries too much. They may starve it and, deliberately or not, cause it to die, if it has no function to them.

Equally bipolar is the balance of power between a slave and his master – his master's dependence on him. In relationships between parents and infants, master and slave, power chances are distributed very unevenly. But whether the power differentials are large or small, balances of power are always present whenever there is a functional interdependence between people (ibid).

Even when the relation is very uneven it is still a relation with some kind of interdependence, with no one having 'full' power over the other. In the situation described above, the power relations had been very alive on stage, and there had been considerable differences, but until we ended up with the 'real group' it had still been rapidly changing. We talked about it afterwards as important for the liveliness and the spontaneity that could emerge. These changes were not a switch or a reverse in the power configuration. Small changes – maybe even the possibility of a minor change – kept it alive.

When the configuration on stage actually was the group again, the risk-taking became much greater and therefore people were handling the situation with more caution. The 'players' involved in this situation afterwards found it very important. They sensed more of a profound change than I actually felt as the joker, and there was a very fruitful patterning of relating in the work after this session in the group.

2.3.1.3 Power and spontaneity

This experience, including the shared reflection on it, clarified an important link between power relations and spontaneity that I had been struggling with for some time. As I see it, power relations can kill spontaneity and liveliness when they become stuck. By this I mean that people reiterate a well-known way of relating so often that it might look as though the power is reified outside the relationship. This means that an equally strong power relation might stifle spontaneity just as much as differences in power, if it is stuck; also here it is the movement in the changes of relations that create liveliness. When the power figuration is chal-

lenged, a risk is taken at that actual moment; and if a certain power figuration is reiterated as the same pattern for a long time, the risk in challenging it seems greater, namely the risk that something unknown and maybe unpleasant might happen.

As the consultant or joker, I see myself participating in this just like the players and the other participants. I may play a special role, but when it comes to uncertainty, risk-taking and being a part of the power figurations – and thence in improvising and changing what is going on – I am as involved as they are.

2.4 Systemic thinking

I will reflect upon a way of thinking that has influenced the Dacapo Theatre, just as it has influenced other people working with organizations: namely, the systems thinking of Bateson (1972, 1979).

The Dacapo Theatre had arranged a day about values in organizations. Clients were invited - people who were saying that they were in the middle of huge initiatives to shift their organizations from being driven by rules to being driven by values. As a part of the day, we were supposed to present a forum play to illustrate how we could work with values using theatre. The consultant who was a part of the planning team became ill that morning, and twenty minutes before we had to start I was asked if I could take over.

I hesitated. I was to have been a participant, without any special responsibility for planning the day. I had been a bit worried about the day because I knew that I would probably disagree with the way of understanding values that would be presented and worked with throughout the day. Now I was becoming responsible for demonstrating how we could work with it.

After some time of frustration with the way people in many organizations were working with values, I had come to a kind of understanding of this. What frustrated me were the so-called 'core values' that most of them were working with,

as if 'the organization' in itself develops and maintains values. I even hear people talk about core values that have to be 'implemented'. I was on the edge of claiming that the notion of values made no sense at all and that it would be an illusion to talk about 'shared values' in an organization, because they would be understood and worked with very differently depending on the situation people were working in.

Some months ago I read Griffin (2002) who, on the basis of Mead, introduces another way of understanding values, namely, cult values and their functionalising. The cult values are the 'collective idealizations that divert attention from the detail of interaction in the living present' (ibid: 116). They become functionalised in ordinary everyday action, where they are constantly negotiated and renegotiated, out of which conflict arises and the functionalized values emerge, perhaps in turn changing the cult values. Griffin says:

I would argue that when organizations are said to be caring, or to have a soul, then the organization is being idealized as a cult. Instead of focusing attention on the daily, necessarily conflictual functionalization of cult value, this idealization of the organization involves a direct application of the cult values as universal norms abstracted from daily life and people are said to be selfish when they do not conform to them.

(Griffin, 2001: 117)

When I was asked to take the consultant's role, I was given two pages prepared by the consultant who went ill. She had planned to introduce a part of a play well known among people from Dacapo. The company on stage had six months ago introduced 'some company values like 'honesty' and 'loyalty'. She would show that values are bound to the identity of the individual, consequently every value would be understood and interpreted from the perspective of the individual.

Her plan was to let the actors play under certain restrictions. She wanted to illustrate that it is impossible to live 100% up to one value (for example, to be 100% honest) and later that the values conflict each other, which she intended to show by choosing the two values 'honesty' and 'loyalty' and let the actors try to play this.

She wanted to explore

- what ‘basic assumptions’ are blocking for the articulated values in practice
- which values seem to be there in practice
- the ideal balancing among the values
- a detailed description of the specific behaviour that expresses each ideal value

In the short time available I was not able to articulate for myself what problems I had with this, but I realised that I had to do something different. Trying to articulate it in a conversation with others from Dacapo would be even more difficult, since it would create an anxiety about the day, for which we all felt responsibility. I ended up using the situation she had chosen, but went in a different direction with it.

We played the situation and I encouraged people to talk with each other about something like, ‘Where do you see conflicting situations challenging the identity of some of the characters?’ The question did not work. People gave explanations, saying what they had been doing wrong and why the characters had to act differently. They were mapping. My intention was to focus on the functionalising of values. Where had there been conflicting situations that might have brought the identity of the characters into negotiation? However, I felt that I was talking into a completely different way of understanding the situation. After some time with this, someone mentioned a point where one of the characters on stage had had problems with a machine producing coins and asked for help from a colleague, which had been refused. I asked several detailed questions about this situation. ‘Did John know that the coins were useless?’ ‘Yes’. ‘Did Inga know?’ ‘Yes and no: usually she would have known, but now she wasn’t sure’. ‘Why did Inga start the machine?’ ‘There was no help at all, and *here she learned that she had to take an initiative herself.*’ This was interesting! In this negotiation with her colleague, a value had emerged for her. This was a small situation that could be the begin-

ning of a real change, and the waste of the bad coins could make a difference that nobody could have foreseen.

Unfortunately only a few in the audience had the same experience as I had. Probably each individual saw different notions of change in play. In the audience were several consultants, and most of them would claim a systemic approach, much like that colleague of mine.

2.4.1 Systemic thinking – what are the key elements?

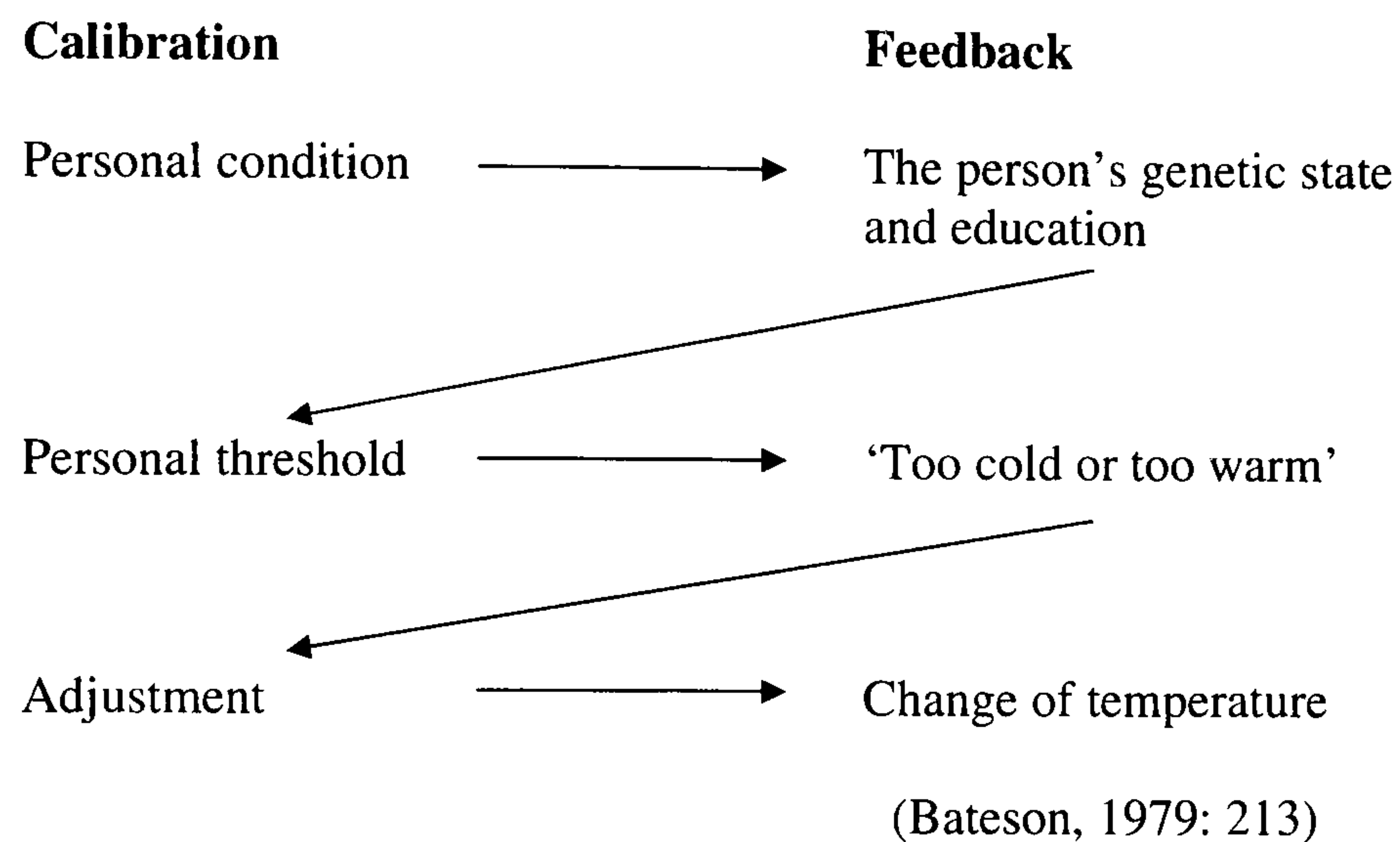
The consultant who went ill was, in her way of thinking, inspired by systems thinking in the line of Bateson's theory of communication.

Bateson, an anthropologist, was influential as one of the pioneers introducing cybernetics into the social sciences. Cybernetics is about feedback systems, and for him it was obvious that the simple feedback system that works in machines was not enough to understand what he saw as social systems. So more advanced forms of control mechanisms were introduced. In his writing Bateson mentions several examples of the so-called 'second order' interaction: among other examples, a much-quoted one is that of a system comprising a central heating system and the human controller.

There is a feedback mechanism in the heating system but it is only capable of keeping the temperature within the preset limits, with no ability to adjust the system to another temperature. Bateson introduces what he calls another level of regulation or 'calibration'. Calibration is what happens when a human adjusts the level of temperature. This calibration is controlled by a feedback mechanism on a higher level than the feedback mechanism in the central heating system, namely whether the person finds it warm or cold. Whether a person finds it warm or cold depends on his or her personal preferences, which are affected by habits of clothing and recent experience such as whether the person has just returned from the tropics or whether he decides that he is becoming too sensitive. All of this con-

trols his feeling of being too warm or cold and hence his adjustment of the temperature.

Bateson's diagram looks like this:



Bateson introduces what he calls 'learning levels'. The lowest level is 'learning level one'. If the person changes his personal threshold, for instance by being 'calibrated to another social status' (sic, *ibid*). At this level he is able to change his habits; what Bateson calls 'second order learning' can happen. Bateson uses the word 'meta-communication' for the communication that takes place on this other level.

From this position it is reasonable to think that, as a consultant, the issue is to try to bring people 'to another level' to make them reflect. The phrase 'learn to learn' is often used about this second level, which deals with talking about the processes and patterns, by shifting the hierarchy. This is often called 'mapping' and Bateson points out that the map itself is not the territory, it is on another level, it then becomes decisively important to 'go meta' and find the patterns. This explains why so many of the audience were focusing on the overall pattern and were not interested in the detail in the way I was.

Cybernetic thinking is about balance and equilibrium, and real change and new equilibrium could not happen at the lowest learning level, Bateson argued. If you want change, you need to see the map, not just go around in the territory. Bateson also argued that it was very important to respect the boundaries, so you cannot look at the map and walk at the same time.

Bateson argued that real change cannot happen at the lowest learning level, you need to see the map, not just go around in the territory. Bateson also argued that it was very important to respect the boundaries between the levels; you cannot look at the map and walk at the same time. Bateson argues that it is bad for an organization to have communication channels that crosses these levels.

Bateson argued that, in a family, mistakes like these lead to 'double binds', situations in which no matter what a person does, he cannot win. The double bind comes when an injunction is followed by another injunction conflicting with the first at a more abstract level. It might be enforced by punishment, and the victim is by a third injunction prohibited from escaping. According to Bateson, in such a situation the victim learns to perceive his universe in double bind patterns, and is not able to tell the difference between the map and the landscape (Bateson, 1972).

Bateson argued that the system was able to make aesthetic choices – systems of this kind are able to recognise and evaluate quality of life. Humans can value a flower because we can see the life within it. It is worth mentioning that according to Bateson this covers many different systems. He says that organizations do have a kind of mechanism that will seek the aesthetically good. The system does not necessarily have consciousness, Bateson said, but he did not find this an easy question and so he avoided answering it (ibid: 132). From this point of view it becomes easy to understand why people are so interested in finding the 'values' that 'drive' the system, the organization. Uncovering these values becomes essential if one thinks that the system can make aesthetic choices.

Bateson's thinking has had major implications, since it was the inspiration for the notion of single-loop and double-loop learning that Argyris and Schön have introduced as organizational learning models (Argyris, 1993, Argyris and Schön, 1978, 1996). Double-loop learning is characterised by the changing of habits or 'mental models', and so it has also inspired Senge (1990) and the idea of a 'learning organization' links to the thinking on 'mental models'. The mental model in the head of a person needs to be changed before a change can happen at the lower level.

Looking at the four points that my colleague mentioned as keys that can be worked with about values (see last section), it is obvious that the questions make sense only if you look at them as questions that can be asked by an observer. It is the observer who has the freedom to intervene, so it seems obvious to let the audience be the observers and then go to another level and reflect – draw the map. The theatre we are doing involves people, however. They too are allowed to bring proposals and try them out. In this context it seems reasonable to say that the action then serves primarily to make people aware of the patterns of which they are a part. Once people can see the pattern they can also decide to adjust it, according to this argument. So the reason for playing theatre is to make the pattern visible so that people can reflect on it and consider changing their mental model.

2.4.2 Maps and patterns

Bateson argued strongly for the need to draw and understand the patterns. There is no learning possible at the important second level without knowing the patterns, and to see and draw them you need to be on the other side of the boundary.⁵ When we do theatre, one of my key questions is about what happened. I ask for simple observations. What do people actually see? Many people, however, talk about the

⁵ Bateson draws on the work done in the field of mathematical logic by Russell and Whitehead, but working with social systems he introduces the importance of time in the link between the levels. In mathematics it is possible to go back and forth, time does not matter. Bateson argued that this is different for social systems. He makes an analogy with the steam engine; taking the time delay into consideration the mathematician Maxwell was able to explain the feedback mechanism that was a part of the steam engine.

pattern they see behind the action but without talking about what they actually saw. I have to insist, and sometimes people do not go into it even then.

If we can draw the map, we will change it, seems to be the assumption. Looking at the schema of the relation between the thermostat and the human, it is obvious that this culminates with ‘personal preferences’, which is a level that Bateson was very vague about. How does change happen here, and how can the ‘calibration’ at a personal level cause change and equilibrium in a large social system? Bateson did not give answers to these questions. He wrote:

.. epistemology is always and inevitably *personal*. The point of the probe is always in the heart of the explorer: What is *my* answer to the question of the nature of knowing? I surrender to the belief that my knowing is a small part of a wider integrated knowing that knits the entire biosphere of creation.

(Bateson, 1979: 85)

And in a note attached to this, he said:

The reader will perhaps notice that consciousness is missing from this list. I prefer to use that word, not as a general term, but specifically for that strange experience whereby we (and perhaps other mammals) are sometimes conscious of the products of our perception and thought but unconscious of the greater part of the processes.

(Ibid: 85)

It seems that Bateson did not want to involve himself in an explanation of the ‘wider integrated knowing’ or how change can happen at the ‘personal level’.

2.4.3 A critique

Stacey et al. (2000) argue that this chain of regulating systems runs into an infinite regress. In the attempt to explain how a system can be self-regulating, another system is introduced. To regulate this a third system is introduced, and from here no explanation is given since personal changes are then about religious conversion or psychotherapy. Stacey et al. see this as an inevitable consequence of systems thinking, because the system needs an observer or controller.

The source of the problem, in our view, lies at the very roots of systems thinking in the theory of causality it is built upon, and cannot

be addressed simply by widening the boundaries of the system to include the observer.

(Stacey et al., 2000: 71)

What Stacey et al. are arguing is that every time you introduce a border or a boundary as necessary for understanding human relations, you inevitably introduce the outsider who is then able to draw the map.

Looking at the four questions that my colleague raised, another issue strikes me that is in strong accord with cybernetic thinking and with the way most strands of systemic thinking have evolved. This is about balance. Inherent in the questions from my colleague I see a desire to equalise power relations and the consequent need to define the ideal balance, which I see as a strong element of Batesonian thinking. Even when such balance is not considered attainable, this ideal is striking. Compared with my own experience of liveliness, described in the previous section, and my feeling that liveliness is linked to ever-changing power relations, this search for stability clearly goes in a different direction from my own.

In this strand of systemic modes of thinking, I do not see a consistent argument that explains how change can happen and how individual identity is shaped and changed. Since it ends up in the individual, the mental model that the single person has is what is important. When it comes to how this might be changed, the question becomes metaphysical.

Alternatively one has to accept that identity and change actually happen in the interaction between people. Here complexity thinking gives an idea about how even micro-interactions might lead to significant changes, and so it becomes important to explore identity and change in the individual as social events. Here George Herbert Mead – and the way Stacey, Griffin and Shaw read him – offers an insight that I shall explore further.

2.5 A reflection of the dialectic of writing

Here at the end of project two I will reflect about the way I have been working with this thesis now, in a first attempt to reflect about *methodology*.

My attempts at writing have been painful, but I have at the same time found that it has influenced my work as a consultant. The theme of my overall project may seem straightforward, but in the writing of it new aspects have emerged. Therefore I have to accept that the writing becomes less fluent, with bifurcation points that surprise me and might be hard to follow for the reader. Paradoxes emerge in the enquiry, and to accept them and play with them, to dare to let them grow and realise that they sometimes change in the iteration of going back to them again, is a part of the process. In this 'final' edition most of this has disappeared in the re-arrangement and reiteration of the text, which at times has felt like a violation, somehow cheating the reader. On the other hand, the writing must be arranged so that the reader can follow the line or argument

A few months ago I was part of discussion at the doctorate programme. We were talking about proposals for the next residential. I got into an argument about the theme of power, at the same time proposing this theme for the next residential. Suddenly another student interrupted me: 'I can't follow you, I felt my irritation growing and now I feel pissed off'. I stopped immediately. I just said, 'Oh', and kept quiet. It did not provoke any aggression in me, only sadness. Why did this happen? What I was saying obviously did not evoke the resonance I would have expected in her. Why did I end up in this?

Resonance in conversation is much more than words, and even if I found her response frustrating it was a response that I could react to immediately. This is also the situation when I am working with theatre. In the writing process the response from others is much more delayed, and the sense-making and movement seems very different for me as a writer than when I am taking part in a spoken conversation, whether we are doing theatre or not. Shotter, being a social constructionist, argues that this mental life is never wholly our own since we 'live a way which is

both responsive, and in response to, what is both "within us" in some way, but which is also "other than" ourselves' (Shotter, 1993: 45). I accept that. What I am doing in my daily life influences what I am writing about and how I think about it. And of course there is response to the writing I am doing. This goes on with fellow students, with supervisors and with colleagues, family etc. Nonetheless it feels like a kind of conversation that is going on, an inner conversation. Nienkamp (2001) has written about internal rhetoric, how we argue and convince ourselves. Building on Mead (1934) and Vygotsky (1986) she argues for a dialogical, rhetorical nature of internal speech, referring to Vygotsky's notion of 'inner speech'. Vygotsky distinguishes between high-context speech situations, where the interlocutors know each other well, and low-context speech situations, in which the interlocutors may be alien to one another or even absent (as in writing). Inner speech is the ultimate high-context speech situation. This is commonly perceived as 'disconnected and incomplete', contrary to lower-context speech, such as conversations and writing. Writing is the ultimate low-context speech situation, and paradoxically I have to draw on the opposite to do the writing. I think that I sometimes end up taking too much for granted when I talk. Maybe this was one of the reasons for my fellow student's irritation. However, in work situations, such as that described in the prologue, we are working in high-context speech situations, because use theatre to avoid generalisations, forcing ourselves and others to be specific. My struggle with this paradox serves in the end not only to facilitate the reader's understanding, but also my own, as I am forced into the processes of arranging my thoughts.

2.5.1.1 My background in natural science

I have a background in toxicology and so I have learned a scientific style of writing that is detached and objective. The following quote is from *Nature* in 1978, a piece of work of which I was a co-author:

The demonstration of a mutagenic effect of aromatic epoxy resins in *S. typhimurium* indicates a genetic hazard, including a cancer risk, for humans exposed to these compounds... Man is exposed to the resins during their manufacture and use either by skin contact with the compound or by inhalation of air contaminated with droplets or powder particles of epoxy resin.

(Andersen et al., 1978)

At the same time, I was influenced by a (Marxist) dialectical way of thinking, in understanding society and change as being the result of conflict. Reading this now, 25 years later, I remember the paradox we felt in writing like this. I remember the care we felt we had to put into every word in that paper: we wanted not only to fulfil the demands of the positivist scientific paradigm, but also to initiate a debate on the current use of epoxy resins. At the same time the arguments had to be presented in a detached way to be accepted, yet also in a provocative way to fulfil our wish for debate.

Shotter (2003) describes similarities between natural science and action research, a term I think he uses for a broader spectrum of research than just the tradition of positivistic natural science. He claims that in the process of research in natural science the issue is not a matter of discovery, but of creation. He says that in the initial, really inventive phase of natural science research, the qualitative aspect is of a value that is highly underestimated among natural scientists in understanding the nature of their work. Shotter argues that in the explorative phases in natural sciences, ordinary language is used, yet at the same time the words acquire a special meaning in the context in which they are used. In natural science, as well as in action research and in daily conversations, we are constructing a grammar that helps us to understand each other. This grammar is not 'there' as claimed by some linguists and structuralists, but constructed and reconstructed in our daily attempts to understand each other; and even the 'rules' about how to talk about it are constructed and reconstructed within the specific context. This resonates extremely well with the experience I had in my ten years of scientific work in a laboratory.

Doing the kind of research I want to do in this project, it is not possible or appropriate to take an outsider's perspective or write in a detached and purely analytical way. It would be absurd to attempt to work within a paradigm where I set up a border and place myself outside to 'draw a map' in my work as a consultant, or to try to do this in my writing. But the metaphors and language that are used in my daily life emphasise the concept of linear and intentional movement from one position to another, not taking into consideration that we are ceaselessly constructing and reconstructing this movement together. Referring to Shotter's 'grammar' – how can the grammar I am a part of in my conversations change? Complex responsive process thinking is influencing my working life. Much of what I have briefly described makes good sense to me, yet at the same time I struggle. How can I play with the themes without obstructing the flow of the conversation I am a part of? The writing might be important here. The paradox between thinking and working in high-context situations, and then being forced to write about the experience, might influence what emerges from it.

I find myself bumping up against a theory or a practice, struggling with it, negating it, finding another way of thinking about it. In the prologue as well as in my subsequent arguments, expanding upon Bateson's thinking and systemic practice, I see the movement of my thoughts as linked to the conflicts involved. Out of my participation in these conflicts, a movement might emerge. It happens in conversation, but this link between conversation and conflict or dispute leads to the notion of *dialectic*, which is a Greek word for the art of disputing.

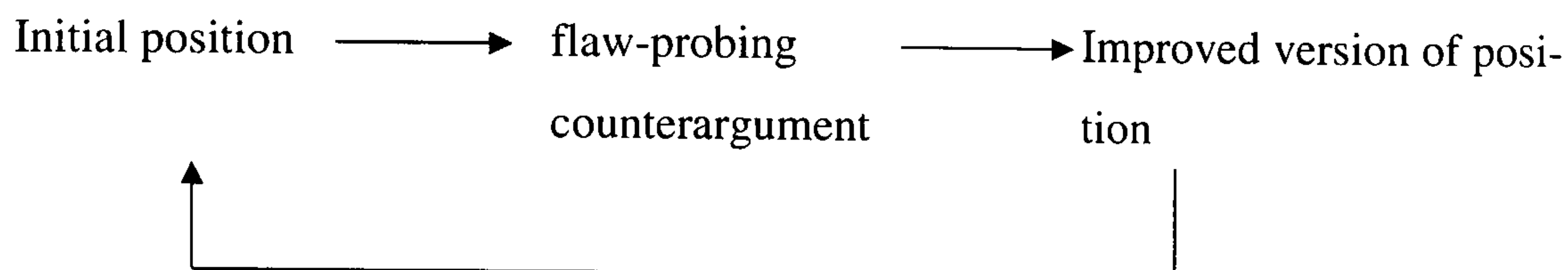
2.5.1.2 *Dialectic thinking as a part of my methodology*

Rescher argues in his book *Dialectics: A controversy-oriented approach to the theory of knowledge* (Rescher, 1977) for what he calls 'pragmatic dialectics'. He introduces the use of dialectics before Hegel as a logically rhetorical convincing tool in arguing. In the medieval universities of Germany there was a formal model for disputation, having a proponent and an opponent and a determiner who presided as a referee. This was a scholastic rhetoric that dealt with the burden of proof, presumption and plausibility. With Hegel's dialectic there is an important shift towards a 'disputational model of inquiry':

The aim here is not to win out over the rival *contender*, but to test a *contention* through the process of setting out the lines of reasoning by which these considerations are in turn met and countered. In such a unilateral reorientation of dialectic, dialectical methodology undergoes an evolutionary transformation from a methodology of *controversy* to one of *inquiry*.

(Rescher, 1977: 47)

Here Rescher argues for a 'dialectic of inquiry', but in a way that differs from Hegel. He proposes the following scheme, which he calls a 'pragmatic' dialectic:



For Rescher the dialectic process becomes an instrument for probing and evaluating, what considerations speak for acceptance of the thesis and what considerations against it to find out to what extent these do offset one another (ibid: 51-52). Here the dialectical process becomes a tool for testing a thesis, in a way that is very similar to the cybernetics thinking of negative feedback.

In his work Rescher carefully develops a way of using dialectics that eliminates time as important. Pro and con factors are general, out-of-time questions. He works in the objectivist, out-of-context tradition that I know from the natural sciences. The theses are there to begin with; the development of them is not seen as a part of the dialectical process. Rescher articulates how this differs from Hegel:

For Hegel, dialectic addresses itself primarily to *concepts* ('terms') and is concerned to improve their *articulation*, whereas our present dialectic addresses itself primarily to *propositions* ('theses') and is concerned to improve their *substantiation*.

(Ibid: 52)

Rescher is splitting articulation and substantiation, understood as a movement to understand what is going on. In accordance with Shotter and Stacey et al., I will argue that conversation is exactly what serves to substantiate.

Rescher concludes that his way of using dialectic thinking is not paradoxical and in no way transgresses the fundamental principles of orthodox logic. For him, time and movement are not linked to dialectical thinking. Arguments are either valid or not valid; and his special variant of dialectic thinking is only a way of testing a thesis, whatever its origin. What Rescher calls dialectic eliminates paradoxes. By negating these types of dialectic, I recognise paradox, and it becomes clear to me that the dialectics that take time seriously are what I have to explore further.

Adorno ([1966] 2000) refers the dialectic thinking back to Plato. He was understanding negation of negation – negating the negative – as a way to achieve something positive (ibid: xix). This is basically the thesis-antithesis-synthesis thinking that Rescher is talking about. Through negating the negative you can find utopia, as Marx was also attempting when negating capitalist society. Adorno reflects on this tradition that he finds in the writing of Marx and also in Hegel, in his work with the notion of absolute spirit. About Hegel, he says:

To equate the negation of negation with positivity is the quintessence of identification; it is the formal principle in its purest form. What thus wins out in the inmost core of dialectics is the anti-dialectical principle; that traditional logic which, *more arithmetico*, takes minus times minus for a plus. It was borrowed from the very mathematics to which Hegel reacts so indiosyncratically elsewhere. If the whole is the spell, if it is the negative, a negation of particularities – epitomized in that whole – remains negative. Its only positive side would be criticism, definite negation; it would not be a circumventing result with a happy grasp on affirmation

(Ibid: 158-59)

This makes sense in relation to the approach I try to develop. You cannot predict the future and so you cannot create a scheme that will inevitably lead to ‘the good’. In negating the negative, a move will happen and it will become an endless story. Nobody knows whether this will lead to something fruitful. This is also true of writing this thesis, by which process I am taking a (another) move.

In trying to argue by negating, I often feel met with aggression. Maybe this is because of the anxiety of the unknown. Maybe it is because people are thinking

about reasoning in a different way, which inevitably leads to the next question: How can I then approach people, not with the intention to avoid aggression, but intending to bring myself more into situations where resonance is felt in the conversation? This leads to the theme of my next project.

2.6 Reflections on re-reading project two

If Project One ‘set the stage’ in this thesis, this project takes off when it comes to an understanding of change as temporal movement in which nobody stands outside. In the middle of writing this project, this insight became very clear for me. However, it was difficult for me to write and talk about this, paradoxically at the same time as this way of thinking resonated very well with the way I have found myself working. In this development I notice some key themes.

In the prologue I explain *knowledge* as emerging in the situation. My feeling in the situation was not that knowledge already tacitly existed in the man’s head, and that we had to bring it forth, as Nonaka would argue (Nonaka, 1991). Tacit and explicit knowledge emerged between us and in each of us simultaneously, and moved as we were working.

The notion of ‘openings’ became a significant movement in my thinking, as this way of expressing movement gave me a language to describe the *paradox of change and no change happening at the same time*. As a consultant, the ability to notice even small differences that could be amplified into significant change is important, but even more important is the ability to find a way of bringing this into the conversation. I have found myself abandoning the notion of ‘openings’ for the reasons I explain in the project: because it seems to collapse the paradox of simultaneous movement and non-movement, of destructiveness and beneficial change as happening in the same movement.

As a part of my reflections about openings I became aware of *time as a paradox*. The present is not a ‘here and now’ in the sense that there is nothing before and after, and the past is a given fact. At the present moment we are what we remem-

ber of the past and what we anticipate of the future, including the expectations and intentions we have in this moment. I shall return later to the implications this has for how to understand spontaneous action: because we must always take what we remember into consideration, spontaneity cannot be pure impulse.

In the communicative gesturing and responding there is much more than the spoken word. I have noticed how *bodily response* was a part of the communication in the work with the learning set, and how gesture became a part of the iterated change. Doing theatre invites us to notice bodily reactions, and I think that this invitation that comes from working physically on stage is amplified by people's response. Experiences like this led to a focus on how others account for bodily response as a part of communication; in Project Three, I reflect on how Gergen sees this, and also in the synopsis I return to this.

Through my experience of working with the other learning set I became aware of a *link between power and spontaneity*. In doing the work with the other learning set, I felt the emotion of risk-taking manifest itself physically. It became clear to me that spontaneity is not about levelling out power differences, to try to obtain stability. Inviting to change necessarily involves an invitation to shift power relations: this is inevitably risky and anxiety-provoking, because of the unpredictability of how it might change your relationships. Without an invitation to take such risks, the liveliness that is linked to spontaneity is not possible, which in turn stifles creativity and change. Such an invitation to take a risk is as hazardous for the person who offers the invitation as it is for the one who accepts it. I will continue exploring this in the synopsis, as it becomes a key insight in this thesis.

Reading my critique of systems thinking, I see two themes emerging. Firstly, that relations between people in general are far from equal, and that being in the middle of such relations makes it impossible to discern equilibrium. Secondly, making an effort to 'stand outside' inevitably removes spontaneity, and therefore the ability to change; this is because our response to others' gestures becomes delayed by the distance we have tried to set between ourselves and the conversation.

The dialectical movement of thought becomes a main theme in methodology of research which I return to in the synopsis. Dialectic is about movement of thought, when meeting opposition there is no guarantee of a positive outcome, as Adorno makes it clear in his work about negative dialectics.

3 Meeting another perspective, Project Three, October 2003

3.1 Prologue

I am sitting in Susan's office with my colleague. Susan is an internal consultant at a division of Frendas. Susan works in a division called 'Con D' for Control Devices. We are meeting with her some months after finishing our participation in a training programme for managers in production. Less than a year ago they reorganised the division, and the training programme was intended to support this change. The managers from the production were going through modules named 'Managing Change', 'Communicating Effectively' and 'Developing & Empowering People'.

Participating in the training programme had been difficult for me, as I felt that I disagreed with much of the thinking. The language used had been mostly about planning, implementing, signalling that the management was supposed to be on top of things. Two of us were consultants and Susan had obviously felt more confident with my colleague. He has now been sacked from our company and has started his own business in competition with us. This is the first meeting with Susan since that. 'People were very happy about your participation', Susan says. 'They appreciate the practical way you work – and it was good that you have met them several times'. She went on: 'I have tried to encourage them to bring you into their departments, but nobody has responded so far'. We continue by talking about what is currently underway at Frendas. Susan talks about another consultant company that is working right now. 'They are taking the work in another direction', she says. 'I am afraid that it is going to disturb the work we have been doing with you'.

Susan is alert to our response, and I realise that this is very different from the previous meetings we have had with her. We are going to meet one of the production managers along with people from the safety organization in a few minutes' time,

and she does not have a plan. As the internal HR consultant she is supposed to come along with ideas; that is what she expects of herself, and that is what others expect of her. An e-mail she had sent before this meeting comes to mind: 'I still think that we need to do more work together, but internally we need to clarify what and where in the division the biggest demand exists'. Initially when I read this, I thought that she was hesitating about us. Now I realise that perhaps her e-mail was hinting that she is a part of an internal power game, and that she does not actually have the authority within the company that I had taken for granted. Susan continues talking about the teams. 'It would be good to work with people's working climate and job satisfaction', she says. I realise that she had tried to convince the production manager about this without success, and she is now looking forward to seeing what might happen at this meeting. This is a huge change in the relation between us, and in this situation I feel extremely alive.

3.1.1 The theme for this project: Improvising in consulting

In my work with Project Two of this portfolio, I explored the emergence of spontaneity in conversation and realised that it is linked to the ability to risk contravening the current power figuration in the present situation. This is what was happening here. Instead of trying to be on top of the situation, Susan dared to run the risk of being seen, in front of us and in front of other people from the company, as an internal consultant who was not in control. Maybe Susan was doing this partly because at that moment she felt weak within the company's internal power game, but anyway the risk she took created a lively response.

At the meeting just described, the change in relation occurred surprisingly and spontaneously. I found myself in a situation that I had not anticipated, but I sensed a certain liveliness, as I was contributing to the improvisation. In the following I will try to make sense of what happened in our web of relating – which involves relations with people from Frendas and internally in Dacapo as well – and how I see this as contributing to the formation of my identity as a consultant who works from the perspective of emphasising the importance of improvisation. The following questions will guide me through this:

- What is ‘improvisation’ in consultancy work, and why do I think it is important in terms of appreciating the paradox of control?
- How do I encounter people who approach consulting and organization from a different perspective?

I will start by exploring improvisation as it can be found in organizational literature.

3.1.2 Organizational improvisation

‘Improvisation’ has become a frequently used term in organizational literature over the last ten years. Several authors use the notion of improvisation in understanding organizational change; amongst others, Weick (2001), (2002); Gergen (1999); Crossan & Sorrenti (2002); and Cunha et al. (2002). Concentrating on Weick and Gergen, I will continue by describing my referential frame for understanding improvisation in consulting.

3.1.2.1 *Weick and the reference to jazz improvisation.*

Weick (2001, 2002) has mainstreamed the notion of organizational improvisation, drawing an analogy to jazz. Earlier he worked with sense-making in organizations, based on constructivist thinking (Weick, 1995). Here he acknowledges surprise, dissonance, failures and uncertainty as important in sense-making because he recognises these as situations where novelty can originate. Against this background, it is not surprising that he became interested in improvisation. As in theatre, jazz improvisation takes place in ensembles, and this might provide an important analogy for understanding the improvisational nature of conversation. Weick quotes Berliner in defining improvisation:

I find it hard to improve the following definition, which is the one that guides this essay: ‘Improvisation involves reworking precomposed material and designs in relation to unanticipated ideas conceived, shaped, and transformed under the special conditions of performance, thereby adding unique features to every creation’ (Berliner, 1994: 241)

(Weick 2001: 286)

In these terms, novelty seems to appear by *combining existing elements* in a new way. Weick concludes that the learning, absorption, and use of certain underlying conventions in jazz allow the player to create a living work. Also in organizational improvisation Weick finds that knowing the rules are extremely important. There is no reference to the relations to other players, except the fact that they all need to be familiar with the conventions.

Over the years Weick has been refining his definition through discussion with others, such as Crossan and Sorrenti, who understand improvisation as *intuition guiding action in a spontaneous way* (Crossan and Sorrenti, 2002: 29). In this discussion Weick tones down the importance of spontaneity⁶. The key word for Weick becomes *intuition*. Weick says, 'intuition desperately needs to be unpacked, because it is the very nature of this process that makes improvisation possible and separates good from bad improvisation' (Weick, 2001: 286)⁷. The unanticipated ideas seem to rely on intuition in the singular individual; in this I cannot see an explanation of how novelty can arise.

Weick refers to Stan Getz, who describes improvisation in terms of a language, *you learn an alphabet, which are the scales, and you learn the sentences which are the chords, and you then talk extemporaneously* (ibid: 293). This is about speaking, not about conversing. Usually jazz improvisation is played in ensembles and with an audience, therefore I will argue, that a kind of conversation is going on. Even if he plays in solitude, I will argue that an internal conversation is going on. However, here the focus becomes on the speaking, not on the conversing. Weick seems not to appreciate conversation as important for improvisation, novelty and transformation.

⁶ I understand this against the background of his constructivist thinking, in which continuous creation of mind and self is going on in the individual core. Weick acknowledges experience as very important, so it is difficult for him to accept spontaneity in the creation of an individual's mental model. Weick is working with a linear time structure. In this, the past is 'there' so spontaneity can only be impulsive action, which Weick cannot accept as key in improvisation. However, intuition remains a mystery.

⁷ I find this distinction between good and bad improvisation too simplistic, as it collapses the paradox of improvisation as destructive and constructive at the same time; but I will return to this later.

Weick also refers to another jazz musician, Max Roach:

After you initiate the solo, one phrase determines what the next is going to be. From the first note you hear, you are responding to what you've just played: you just said this on your instrument, and now that's a constant. What follows from that? And then the next phrase is constant. What follows from that? And so on and so forth. And finally, let's wrap it up so that everybody understands that that's what you're doing. It's like language you are talking, you're speaking, you're responding to yourself. When I play, it's like having a conversation with myself.

(Ibid: 291)

Here I see a focus on the present moment, on what has just happened, and what is next, about finding oneself in the middle of a flow in which one can conduct an internal conversation. I can recognise that, for instance in my conversation with Susan. However, Weick is focusing on another element: he notices the importance of retrospect. What he notices is that form, memory and practice are all 'key determinants of success in improvisation'. To improve memory is to gain retrospective access to a greater range of resources, Weick says. In this I hear an understanding of the past as a fixed reality that you build upon when you improvise. This does not resonate with my own experience. As mentioned in the prologue, my perception of what had been said earlier in the e-mail from Susan took on a completely new meaning for me. One can say that the present situation changed my perception of the past.

To sum up:

- Weick is focusing on intuition combined with knowledge of the past.
- In his focus on intuition, he underplays the importance of spontaneity in improvisation.
- He works from the perspective of individual mental models, so he understands communication in sender–receiver terms.
- There is not much focus on relating to others, apart from stressing the importance of everyone being familiar with the conventions for working together. How these conventions have emerged becomes unclear.
- How novelty can emerge also remains unclear.

3.1.2.2 *Gergen and 'transformative dialogue'*

Gergen (1999) argues from a social constructionist position, and is interested in what he calls 'dialogic potentials'. He talks about 'the unfolding conception of transformative dialogue', where new resources for communication seem essential. The challenge is to 'shift the conversation in the direction of self-reflexivity – towards questioning one's own position'. He links improvisation to this dialogue in his attempts to understand what constitutes transformation. He is searching for 'ideal speech conditions': equal rights to participate, and participants being of equal power. This should ideally lead to a dialogue in which everyone introduces their desires and wishes, leading to solutions that meet with the approval of all participants (ibid: 153). Gergen finds it important to establish such conditions; not a set of rules, but what he calls a vocabulary that is useful for a transformative dialogue.

Gergen describes forms of what he calls 'co-constituting coordination'. One is what he calls 'rhythms of conversation':

They developed rhythms of conversation, eye contact, speaking and listening. In my view transformative dialogue may thrive on just such efforts toward mutual coordination. This is primarily because meaning-making is a form of coordinated action. Thus, if we are to generate meaning together we must develop smooth and reiterative patterns of interchange – a dance in which we move harmoniously together.

(Ibid: 160)

This coordination of rhythm is – for instance – responding to a smile with a smile, as opposed to a blank stare. Each response must resonate with the preceding action, and not negate it, he says. Gergen links improvisation to this coordination of rhythm:

The point of improvisation here is to secure a mutuality of rhythm by means of which conversational participants may move closer, to share a space from which a new building forth may proceed.

(Gergen, 1999: 161)

Reading Gergen, I came to think of a meeting I had with Susan prior to the one described in the prologue. We were talking about one of the modules in the training programme for managers, and our conversation went as follows:

Susan: We need to fill up their toolbox. I have chosen situational leadership because it fits into four boxes, it is simple, and it fits with the Frendas culture. Before you work with them we will do a test on their abilities in situational leadership.

Henry: What would it mean for people to do a test like this?

Susan: It will help them to ask some questions, so that when they are in situations where they are faced with a choice, they can move between different leadership styles.

Henry: But the reality is much more complex. How will this help them to face their daily challenges?

Susan: Other tests we already have done have shown that they don't give feedback to their employees, and they need to.

Henry: But this gives people an illusion that they can somehow 'stand outside' what is happening, observe it and then choose how to act.

Susan: Yes, and it is good sometimes to put yourself in the third person.

In this conversation I felt that we were repeating viewpoints that we had expressed many times before. Still I see this conversation as improvised. We might say words to each other that seem predictable, but none of the remarks were planned or rehearsed, they simply came as a response to what the other had just said; however, we were not moving harmoniously together. For Gergen this would probably not be within his definition of transformational dialogue, and consequently it was not improvisation in his terms. Like Weick, Gergen is solely focusing on the good, not appreciating destructivity as linked to the creation of novelty.

But if the meetings with Susan had been without conflicts like this, I do not think that the conversation in the prologue could have happened. I think that challenging each other like this, still trying to find ways to continue the relation, has been important for the situation described in the prologue to emerge. Apparently my experience does not resonate with Gergen's. I have found inspiration in theatre improvisation, as developed by Keith Johnstone as mentioned in the previous projects. In improvisation, the actors are encouraged to focus on the other actors, acting in response to the other, i.e. 're-acting' instead of acting. By doing this the actors find their roles and the play emerges at the same time, without a predeter-

mined structure or plan. When I became aware of this I could see how this shift in attention for the actors becomes creative, and it struck me how extremely alive the play becomes. When doing this actors are not moving harmoniously together, as emerging conflicts are what drives the scenes. But they are moving together, as they constantly have an awareness of each other as they react and respond.

In Project Two, I explored the relation between power and spontaneity, working with improvisational theatre. I reached the conclusion that when the power relation is open to change, this is linked to the emergence of spontaneity. This leads in a very different direction from that taken by Gergen. Earlier I would have worked to change the power relationship, so that the weaker partner could be more in 'balance' with the stronger, in accordance with Gergen, and I would have seen this as important for participation and development. Reading Elias (1998) has inspired me to understand power as an ongoing relation in temporal processes among humans that constrains the relation, while paradoxically the same constraint also enables the relation. Spontaneity might occur even in power relations that are very unbalanced, if at any given moment in the relationship the people involved are able to risk the possibility that the power relation might change. I felt that was the case in the situation referred to in the prologue.

What is left for me in Gergen's work is his focus on relation and on bodily resonance. I do not think that this involves simply cause and effect (although a smile responded to with a smile obviously indicates a certain effect), but rather he hits upon something important when he focuses on micro-interactions between bodies in relational action.

To summarise so far:

- Conversation is improvised; we never know the next word to say because we are responding. However, often we find ourselves and others responding in unsurprising ways.
- When in the present moment power relation is open for change, liveliness and spontaneity can flourish.

- Conversation, though always improvised, might give different perceptions from time to time – experienced as liveliness, spontaneity, awareness and shifts of perception.
- Differences of power are paradoxically enabling constraints in improvising.

3.1.2.3 Improvisation in organizations from a complex responsive processes perspective

I have here argued for improvisation to be understood communicatively. Not as a special dialogue as Gergen suggests, but as responding in ordinary conversation. When I began to understand complex responsive processes, as developed in the work of Stacey, Griffin and Shaw (Stacey et al., 2000; Stacey, 2001; Griffin, 2002; Shaw, 2002) building on Mead’s understanding of communication, I recognised a link between improvisation as described by Johnstone and gesture–response in conversation as one act (Mead 1932, 1934). Reacting, in theatre improvisation, takes place in the present moment. It involves a movement of the situation, which also shifts the relationships between the emerging roles of the actors. The spectators are waiting for these characters to be changed, which often happens as a part of the shifting relationships. When I was writing Project Two I began to express this in a language of temporality and movement, inspired by Mead and Stacey et al. with links to Hegel’s phenomenology. I came to see an organization not as ‘being there’ in a reified sense, but as ‘being there’ because when we talk about it and relate to each other about it, we are patterning conversations and actions, just as the situation emerges in theatre improvisation. If in organizational life themes like ‘structure’, ‘organization’, ‘culture’ and ‘purpose’ are not there as physical objects, as things, then they become real only because we continue to reconstruct them, through talking about them again and again. For me the implications of this are enormous for the way one understands continuity and change. Even the most trivial conversation can be seen as improvised because it emerges as a reaction to what others have just said or done in the relationships we are a part of. In this continuously ongoing improvisation, we obviously cannot repeat ourselves, because even in trying to do or say the same we inevitably introduce variations on what seems to be a repetition. Thus we are paradoxically main-

taining and changing relationships at the same time. These changes might be insignificant and disappear before being noticed, or they might become significant, and be recognised as novelty.

This ongoing process of interaction is referred to by Stacey, Griffin and Shaw as complex responsive processes. They see an analogy to the way Prigogine (1997) has spoken of complexity in reference to the distribution of gas particles in an environment that is far from a state of equilibrium. Under such circumstances, he finds that when heated the particles organise themselves into patterns, which he calls 'dissipative structures'. This happens through the micro-interaction of the particles – what Prigogine calls a 'resonance phenomenon' – and cannot be externally predicted or controlled. The analogy is that the micro-interactions we all are involved in might influence overall patterns, similar to the resonance phenomenon among the gas particles resulting in dissipative structures. Amongst humans, these local interactions sustain and change what we call organizations, groups, networks, family and society. By being involved in these local interactions, we create our identity at the same time, just as the relationships among actors in theatre improvisation create their roles in *reacting* (or re-acting), and in doing so create the situation. Furthermore, we are also making sense of what we are doing, not as a separate analytical process, but merely through acting in the present.

In her book *Changing Conversations in Organizations*, Patricia Shaw offers the analogy of organizational change as an ensemble improvisation:

I want to help us appreciate ourselves as fellow improvisers in ensemble work, constantly constructing the future and our part in it as daily activity as we convene or join or unexpectedly find ourselves in conversations. I have called this a craft because, just as we can learn to conceptualise, to design, to communicate and persuade, we can also learn to participate with imaginative concreteness as co-narrators, joint authors, co-improvisors, and in so doing, locate our competence as leaders differently.

(Shaw, 2002: 172-3)

As a consultant I am improvising with the client – together with the actors. Here I see improvisation in two ways: namely, understanding human interaction as improvised, even when we seem to be repeating ourselves; and at the same time ac-

cepting that in improvisation and in conversation the perceived 'quality' might be different from time to time, by which I mean liveliness and present relating by risking change in the power relations.

Most clients and many colleagues think differently from me, and Susan is among these. I will continue by exploring the relationship with people from Frendas as it went on before the meeting in the prologue.

3.2 Negotiating our participation in the managers' training programme

Susan was aware of Dacapo, but her manager (the financial director of Con D) did not quite understand why they should cooperate with a theatre group to work through their change process. Hence a meeting was arranged. Dacapo was represented by two consultants and two actors. Susan had brought together around ten people for the meeting. The Financial Director started by introducing the 'Con D triangle' as a part of the change process, see figure 1.

He said that it was necessary to change the attitudes of the employees. The middle managers and supervisors had to explain this to the workers. He said this in a casual tone, as if it was an easy and straightforward task, and I sensed that he did not expect any surprises in that part of the plan. What would this task be like for the supervisors?" I asked. I proposed that we play the situation. A manager who was on his way to Poland to be responsible for a factory there responded. I knew him because we had been working with his department a year before. He made a proposal about what to say as the supervisor, and I encouraged him to try it out with the actor playing an employee. He immediately ran into serious problems, not knowing what to say in response to challenges from the actors playing the workers. The conversation became very engaged as it continued with the theme that it was obviously not an easy task communicating the 'Con D triangle' to the workers. This meeting took less than two hours, but it resulted in a breakthrough. Our response might have challenged the concept of a fixed role for the supervisors and workers.

We act responsively and with speed – and we innovate

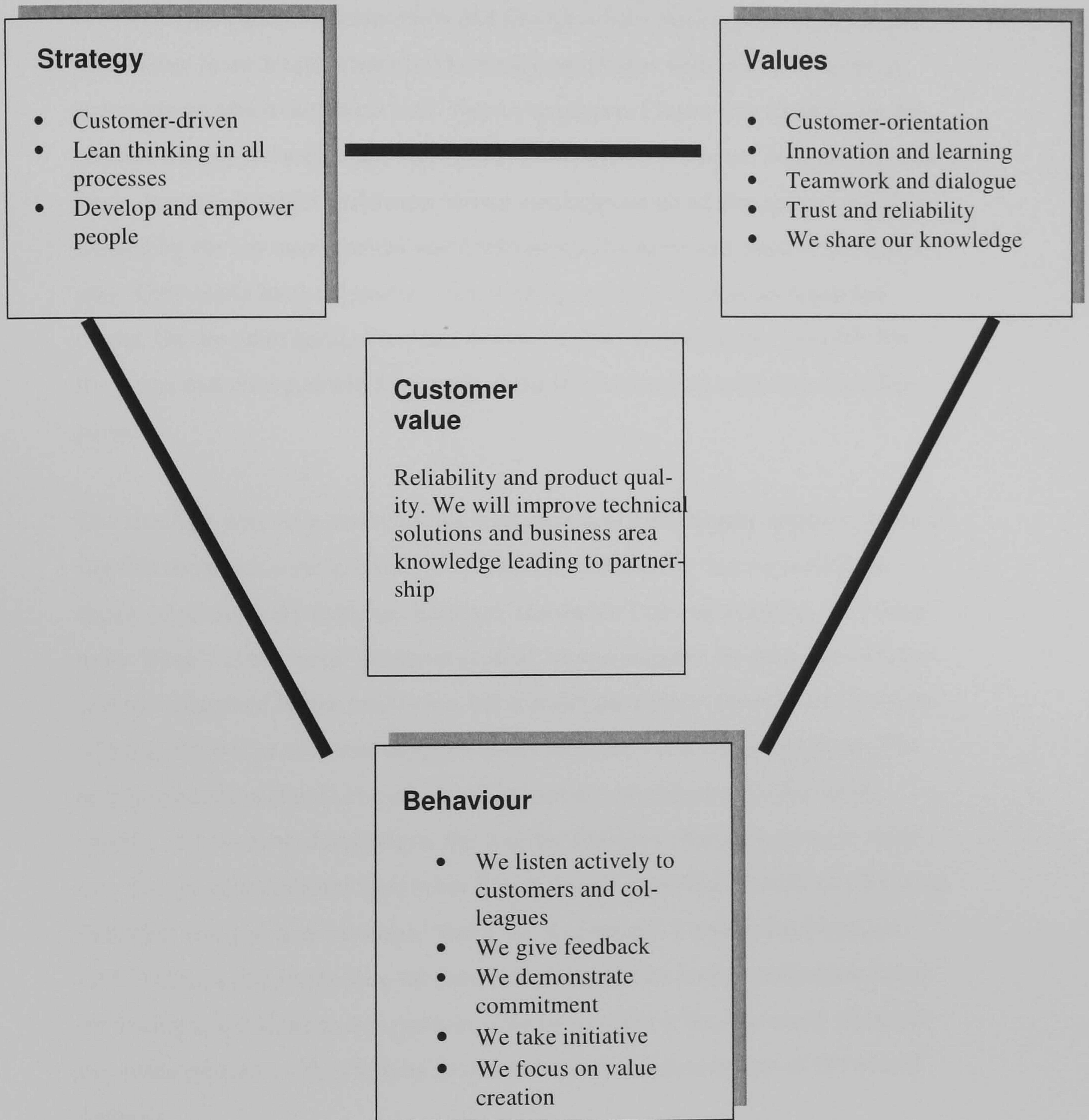


Figure 1: The Con-D triangle

The participants were brought by the actors into the attitude of supervisors trying to deliver the message to the employees. Playing this fictitious and at the same time very realistic situation forcefully introduced a theme that could not easily be avoided. This called forth emotions and thoughts from those present, who found themselves in an actual situation where they could now imagine themselves as supervisors (which they were not). From experience, I knew that focusing on the task for the supervisors might be important. However, it was not without risk raising it, because it might undermine strong assumptions about change processes, as created by the top management and implemented by (amongst others) the supervisors. They could have refused to work with it, or neglected it as an important theme. On the other hand, if we had avoided a risky conversation, probably the liveliness that emerged when we created the fictive meeting might not have happened.

The situation was very powerful; the liveliness was immediately apparent. I could say that there was a certain kind of resonance, a resonance that organised the theme of relating. By using the notion of resonance I am not claiming something to be 'there', as the word 'common ground' would suggest; the next conversation will be influenced by the resonance, but it is not possible to predict how, because – just as resonance of sound happens in the moment – this also is temporal. The resonance strikes chords in each of us, but not necessarily exactly the same chords, and the next chord affects the way the previous chord resonates in memory. This is very different from what Weick quotes from Max Roach, emphasising that what was just played is now 'there' as 'a constant'. I notice that Prigogine (1997) claims that in physics, the patterning of particles could not be understood by tracing and following one particle, only by looking at the resonance phenomenon amongst them – thus linking local interaction with emergence of the overall patterns.

3.2.1.1 About Con D at Frendas

Three different kinds of change activities were to be worked with at the same time:

1. Customer orientation. Frendas was well known for producing 'quality', but they were often seen as too expensive. Because of this they had decided to reorganise in what they called 'Value Streams', which gathered together all those involved in a product line, from the purchasing people to sales people. This was a break with the former organization, where sales was one organization and production another.
2. 'Lean thinking' was introduced with the aim of completely reorganising the production. They had started in one production area, and now they wanted to go further, but they had experienced difficulties with people's attitudes.
3. They wanted to 'develop' and 'empower' people to take decisions within an agreed framework in a new team structure.

3.2.2 Ideas for training the managers

A short time later, we had another meeting where we were introduced to the model that Frendas intended to use in their change process:

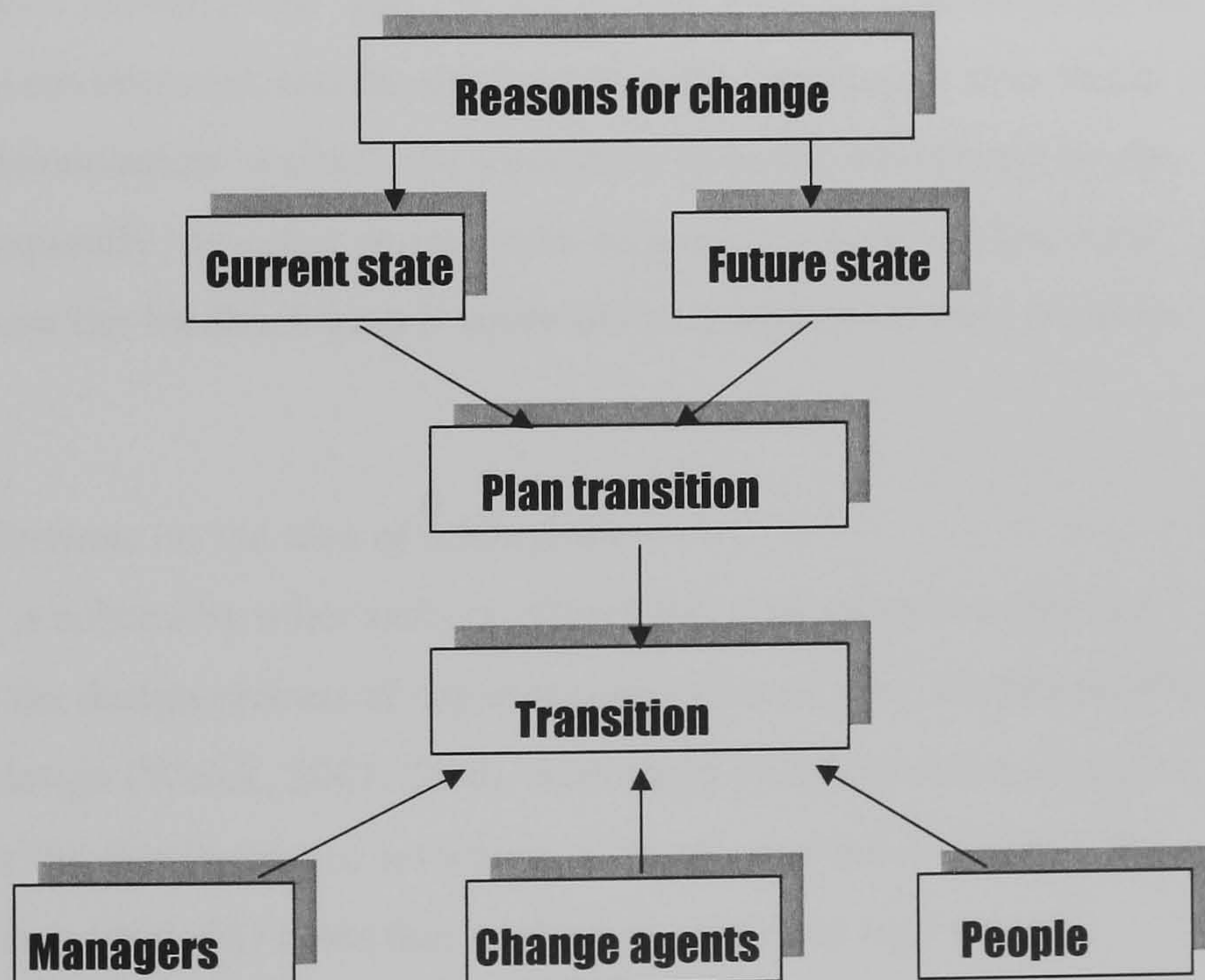


Figure 2: Model for change at Con-D

At group level, the plan was outlined as follows:

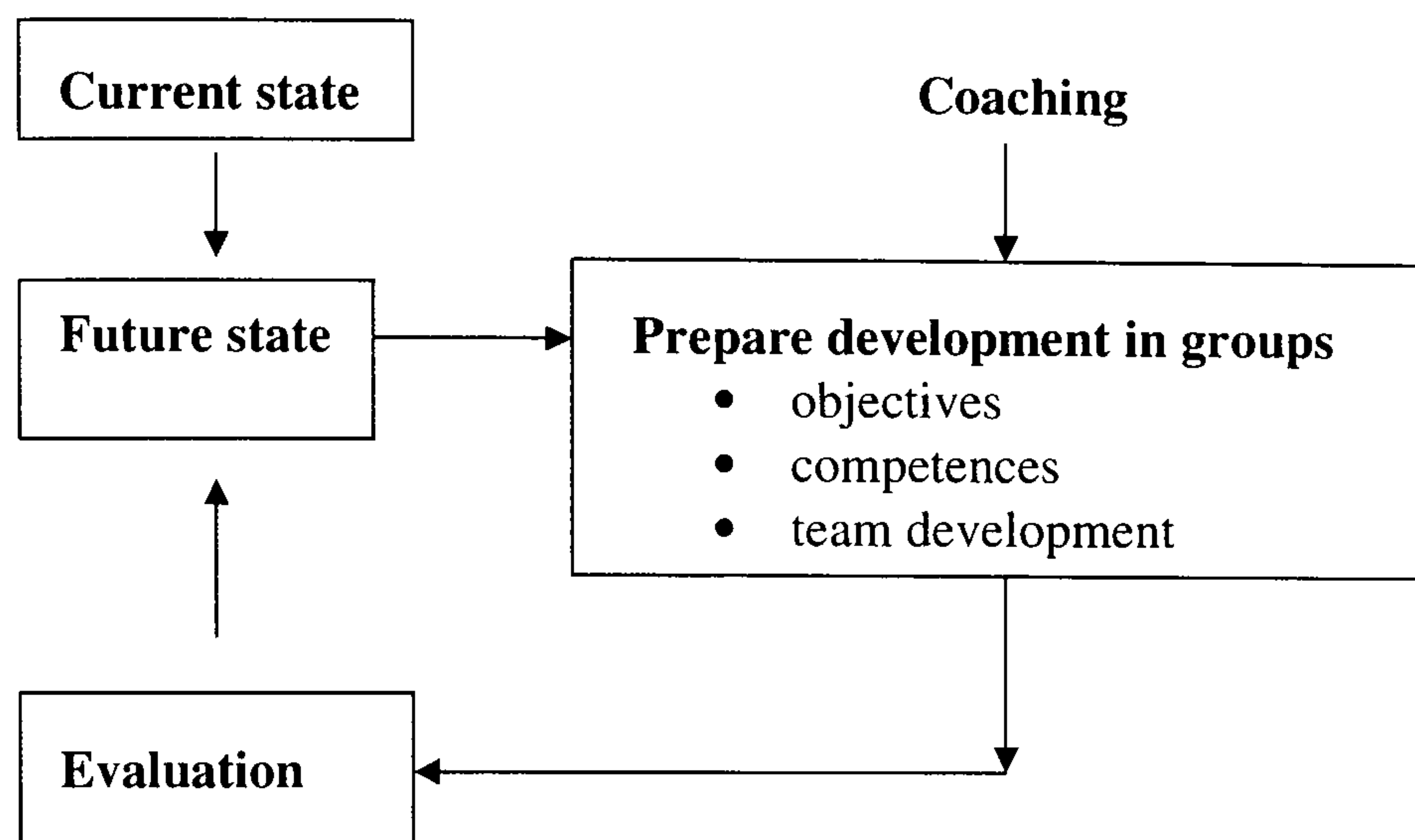


Figure 3: Plan for change at group level

Over the next few months, the managers should analyse ‘current state’ and ‘future state’ in the management training sessions, and prepare the development. Completing this analysis identifies the ‘gap’, which is what must be done to match the challenges of the environment and the strategy; also the ‘development in teams’ as well as the ‘implementation’ was seen as something to be decided purely by the managers. Consequently, the other people were supposed to do what they were told. Note also how the feedback loop is supposed to ensure the correct development.

3.2.2.1 Reflections on the idea of a blueprint

This description is echoed by other authors. Weick has commented on this in a study looking at the design process of organizations, viewed from the perspective of architectural design (Weick, 2001: 56-8). According to this tradition, design is said to determine the distribution of resources, authority and information in the organization. Weick (ibid: 58) notes that implied assumptions here are that:

1. Design is a blueprint.
2. Design is constructed in a single point in time.

3. Design produces order through intention.
4. Design creates planned change.

This is Weick's image of the traditional process – which is what he tries to challenge by introducing what he calls improvised design. The process Con-D had rolled out seemed to be founded on exactly these assumptions. The future state was the blueprint, which the managers were supposed to design. Out of the design, a change was intended to bridge the 'gap'. The managers are meant to figure out what should be done, which is considered a rational and objective act. Once this is done, the only outcome that is expected has already been planned. This is what Stacey et al. (2000) call a mix of rational and formative causality or teleology. The employees have to do what is already decided, and the task of the managers is to enforce that this is what happens. In his work about strategic management, Stacey notes that the underlying assumptions about individuals in the strategic choice tradition are based on cognitivist psychology. People are assumed to behave rationally, so this approach does not take emotion into account (Stacey, 2003a: 77).

From a position of working with improvisation in consulting, I found this problematic. I see improvisation as belonging to another kind of causality - what in complex responsive process terms is called 'transformative causality'. The conversations that go on are forming and shaping the next step, and consequently changing the future and the meaning of the past; and it is not possible to step outside this.

3.2.3 Transition as a theme for conversation

At the meeting with the financial manager I had experienced the participants as open to critiquing their model of change, as long as we were able to work with specific problems. After Susan's presentation of the training programme we referred to the experience that had convinced the financial director, and we referred to a quote about the change process that had appeared in their internal magazine: 'Being in this change process is like driving a car in a dense fog'. I argued that our contribution could be to work with the ability to cope with surprises.

Susan agreed that usually gap analysis is thought of as very rational. Of course it was not that simple, she said: people forget to bring in the reality of human behaviour, natural resistance towards change. Therefore she had to introduce the notion of *transition* into the organization, to encourage working with the psychological elements of change. This was difficult, because it was an ‘engineering culture’, she said. In the middle of transition there was a ‘neutral zone’ in which unpredictable things might happen, which was highly anxiety-provoking for people. One of the main tasks was to train the managers to be prepared for this. This was exactly what she wanted us from Dacapo to help with. She wanted us to teach the managers to cope with the surprise it would be for them to be in the middle of their employees’ transition. I found myself hesitating, not being able to fully explain why, even to myself.

I found an e-mail that I had sent shortly after the meeting to other people in Dacapo: ‘Susan told about the basis on which they are working. Instead of change management they have chosen a model they call ‘transition’. After creating the plan they intend to go into a field that is more open than purely implementation of the planned. We agreed that one way of understanding our role could be ‘meeting reality’, e.g. what might happen when the managers meet the workers and explain about the plan they have constructed.’

3.2.3.1 *Linguistic shading?*

In this way we reached a kind of agreement, perhaps by negotiating in a way that Gergen might call ‘linguistic shading’ – where the risky words are hidden behind other words.

If our statements of belief contain words that are not fixed in their meaning, then they are open to linguistic shadings that can transform them into something else. Opposing beliefs need not necessarily remain in this condition. Everything that is said could be otherwise, and with appropriate shading could be brought into a state more resembling what is otherwise stated.

(Gergen, 1999: 161)

He gives an example of this. If you oppose someone who favours the death penalty, by linguistic shading you might choose a phrase like ‘radical measures

against heinous crime' instead. The conversation could find agreement and common ground in the term 'radical measures'. I sense that Gergen (who, as I mentioned earlier, finds harmony important) tries to understand how tension might be reduced.

I do not agree with Gergen in this, it was not in an atmosphere free of tension that the conversations about transition happened, and definitely power was in play. I had not read about the concept of transition, but I think that Susan was also influenced by our relationship in her communication about the concept of transition. So partly misunderstanding each other, while searching for a way to continue, was a tension that helped to create what followed.

I hear Gergen's notion of 'linguistic shading' in terms of the 'sender-receiver' communication model. If I send my message linguistically shaded, this is an opportunity for locating common ground. Reading my own e-mail again, I think of this differently. Even if I was not satisfied, I sensed that a kind of resonance had emerged between us, which was not the discovery of existing common ground, but awareness, liveliness, that created a certain way of understanding each other.

3.2.3.2 Reflecting on transition as a theme for conversation

A year later, when writing this, I have read what Bridges (Bridges, 1991) thinks about transition. For Bridges it is not change in itself that poses the problem, but the psychological adaptation that each individual needs to make in response to the change. By transition Bridges means 'the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation' (ibid: 3). Bridges offers a model of three phases, which Susan also referred to. Transition starts with an ending: people need to say goodbye to the earlier situation. The next phase is the 'neutral zone', 'the limbo between the old sense of identity and the new'; and finally, people embrace the new beginning. This way of thinking sets a clear boundary around the people who are in the transitional phase. The manager is outside, and it is his responsibility to get people 'through the wilderness of transition'⁸ (ibid: 6).

⁸ Bridges refers to Moses, leading his people from Egypt to the new land

This approach reflects the same split as mentioned in the gap analysis. Here, the managers design and manage not only the change, but also the psychological process each individual has to go through, thought of as inevitable. The responsibility not only for planning the change, but also for planning the way people manage it, lies with the manager, and Bridges claims to have the solution: good advice and rules to follow for the manager.

This way of thinking about transition does not challenge the tenets of rational and formative causality thinking previously mentioned. Also here the managers are supposed to plan the ending and the new beginning, as well as assisting with the transition. I did not read Bridges' material until recently. Obviously this way of thinking puts the focus on human relations that Susan saw as crucial to the success of managed change, but because of the formative character of the manager's role it is very hard to see a place for improvisation in this process. When I was talking about the novelty that might emerge, Susan might solely have been talking about handling people's emotions following the implementation of a rock-solid plan.

Bridges' thinking belongs to the tradition of humanistic psychology: people can be motivated to experience more of their true selves. In his reflection on strategic choice theory, Stacey concludes about the way human beings are understood:

So, when it comes to the micro level, strategic choice theory alternates between two views of human nature, the cognitivist and the humanistic. The former tends to be predominant when the theory focuses on control systems and the latter when it focuses on motivation, leadership and culture. The way both are used, however, has an element in common. It is implicitly assumed that the individual members of an organization are all the same and that interactions between them are all the same.

(Stacey, 2003a: 78)

In hindsight it looks obvious. The management wants to implement a strategic plan, and the internal HR consultant tries to include elements of humanistic psychology, noticing that the management are not aware of the emotions it might arouse among the people involved.

And still, this would be too simple. It ignores the fact that we were influencing each other in these conversations. Even if Susan was referring to Bridges, another meaning was emerging, not clearly spoken as it appeared and disappeared for both of us. Obviously we did not have a clear mutual understanding. We had different understandings about what we were doing, but still we were improvising how to move forward together.

I find it important to continue to reflect on the kind of expectations engendered by mainstream consultancy literature.

3.3 Process consultancy

Susan is well aware of the literature on consulting. It might be worth examining the relations with Susan and other people at Frendas from a mainstream perspective on consultation, namely that of Edgar Schein. For several years he has championed what is called ‘process consultation’. I will here refer primarily to *Process Consulting Revisited*, the latest edition of his work. According to him, the ultimate goal for a consultant is ‘the establishment of an effective helping relationship’ (Schein, 1999: 1). Process consultation, then, is to ‘help a human system to help itself’ (ibid: 1).

3.3.1.1 Schein’s thinking about process

Man is seen as a system, which means that there are boundaries. This corresponds to Schein’s understanding of communication. He uses the dominant model of ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’, two independent entities each with their own filters of interpretation and independent intentions. Since these are two systems, there needs to be some common ground if any communication is to make sense; care is needed to ensure that ‘the right message gets across’, to which end some principles and guidelines for communications are given (ibid: 133-140). In this framework, ‘process’ takes on a specific meaning:

The primary focus will be on process. Consultants/helpers must recognise that process, i.e. *how* things are said and done, is as or more important than content, i.e. *what* is said and done. Yet most of us are not very familiar with process as a concept or focus of attention.

(Ibid: 145)

In this way Schein splits the content from the way things are dealt with, and the latter is what he means by 'process'. He is seeking patterns in the way situations are handled. A very important part of the consultant's work is to observe how this pattern within the group is influencing the system, assuming that this can more or less be done from outside the system. This has a certain influence on our understanding of process, which Stacey describes in the following way:

If one takes a systemic perspective, ... then interaction, participation and process have a very particular meaning. As parts of a system, individuals are interacting with each other to produce a system. Participation means that they participate as parts of the system that their interaction creates. The meaning of process within the system is that of interaction to produce a system. In all of these cases, interaction creates something that is abstracted from direct experience of interaction itself.

(Stacey, 2003b: 272)

Obviously this abstraction has huge implications for the ability to participate in direct interaction, so the word 'process' becomes very different.

3.3.2 Improvisation understood as managing process

This becomes very clear in a chapter where Schein talks about helping as 'drama'. Because the 'scripts of consulting' are very unclear, the consultant 'must be prepared to rewrite the script constantly'. Schein argues that helping as a consultant therefore demands improvisational skills, which for him means to 'learn ... how to create the right scenes and to manage the dramatic process towards a desirable outcome' (Schein, 1999: 108), which is fundamentally different from my approach. I agree with Shaw, who comments on Schein from the perspective of complex responsive processes thinking:

..this is very different from the way I have been using the terms 'spontaneity' and 'improvisation' to imply the paradoxical process of constructing an open-ended future that is constructing us at the same time.

(Shaw, 2002: 128)

Schein sets up some ideals about the process consultant. The 'PC', as he calls them, takes a role very distinct from two other roles a consultant can take, namely the expert and the doctor treating a patient. The expert knows the answers for the client, and their job is to explain these to the client. In the terminology of Schein the doctor diagnoses the illness, while the PC makes a diagnosis at the same time as action planning with the client: the goal for the PC is to 'increase the client system's capacity for learning so that it can in the future fix its own problems' (Schein, 1999: 19). Since the goal is increasing the client's capacity for learning, it is interesting to examine what is to be learned. Schein refers to Bateson, Argyris and Schön, and especially to Senge's concept of organizational learning as capacity building. In this context learning is about recognising patterns and drawing the maps, learning what the interaction means for the system. In his later work Schein is influenced by a psychodynamic approach, and he wants to map the interaction in these terms.

There has also been a movement in Schein's thinking about the relationship with the client. The focus on alignment with the client, and working on a common ground, seems to fit with creating a kind of psychological contract, an informal agreement. In a decade-old book, he says:

At the level of the psychological contract it is important to get out into the open as many misconceptions as possible and to try to be as clear as possible about my own aims and style of work.

(Schein, 1988: 130)

Later he says:

The reality for me has been that the nature of the contract and who the client is with whom I should be doing the contracting shift constantly, so that contracting is virtually a perpetual process rather than something one does up front prior to beginning consultation.

(Schein, 1999: 29)

A similar difference is to be seen in determining who the client actually is. Although not explicitly stated, the earlier book talks about 'the client' in a way that differs substantially from the following, more recent, quote:

I am always very clear about who the contact client is when I am first called or visited, but once I have begun to work with the contact client and we have defined the next step, the client base starts to expand in unpredictable ways.

(Ibid: 29)

I appreciate these reflections on his experience, as they resonate so well with my own. However, he does not acknowledge the paradoxes this can lead to, since this obviously contradicts his definition of process consultation: 'Process consultancy is a creation of a relationship with the clients ... *in order to improve the situation as defined by the client*' (ibid: 20, my italics). Schein does not address questions like: Who is the client (for whom, by definition, he then works)? What if differences and contradictions emerge between the contact client and a client who became involved later? Working with themes like this is inevitable in consultancy; as I see it, this is a part of the real work that cannot be solved by simple definitions or prescriptions.

Obviously my approach is very different from what Susan could expect of a consultant following Schein. I do not think it is valid to measure our legitimacy by how well we improve the situation as defined by her or Frensdas. From the meeting with the financial director it is obvious that our legitimacy is also about challenging the way the client defines the situation. I do not experience this as well defined when we meet; in fact, this is what the improvised conversations helped to achieve.

Shaw has commented in a similar vein on Schein's approach to consultancy. She argues that the kind of conceptualisation Schein finds essential can only be so if creating maps is felt to be essential:

Instead of thinking as if systems behind or below or above our immediate interaction are causing our actions, this series is proposing that we think as participants in the patterning process of interaction itself as the movement of experience.

(Shaw, 2002: 129).

I think that this identifies a source of conflict between Susan and myself. Susan has focused a great deal on finding the patterns, wanting to teach people to see them and to map them, and she expects us to help her with that project. For the managers the perspective was different, and I experienced that most of them accepted our improvisational way of working, maybe because it resonated with their own experience.

In the less recent book Schein (1988) draws an analogy between process consulting and therapy, calling this a 'sociotherapist model'. 'The sociotherapist model suggests itself if one considers that the consultant is primarily dedicated to helping the system help itself in terms of whatever pathology he may find there' (ibid: 193), so what becomes most important for the process consultant is to 'pass on his skills and values'.

Schein has elaborated on this by having included a chapter in the later book called 'The Psychodynamics of the Helping Relationship'. Here the language of psychotherapy is used: the client may feel resentment and defensiveness, dependency and subordination, and transference of perceptions and feelings based on experience with other helpers. The helper, the consultant, may feel counter-transference etc.

Schein explains these reactions as a manifestation of the power relation between the consultant and the client. The consultant has by definition more power than the client, so an important task for the consultant is to level out these power differences. The client may react adversely if these differences are not levelled out. So the strategic goal for the consultant is to 'achieve a workable psychological contract' (Schein, 1999: 40). I see this as an attempt to try to reduce anxiety. As mentioned earlier, this is completely different from the way I understand power.

3.3.2.1 Key points in Schein's approach to consultancy

- Schein explicitly talks about communication in sender–receiver terms. This means that people are not influencing each other directly, by communicating.
- Schein works from a systems perspective. The role of the consultant is to stay at the border of the system and help the human system to help itself. Schein does not address the paradox that comes from letting the system set the task and at the same time exerting influence as consultant.
- When working, the consultant is responsible for ‘the process’. This inevitably sets a meaning of process, implying that it can be seen as separate from content and meaning-making.
- Over time, Schein has moved towards a psychodynamic perspective. Helping the system means helping people within it to see the dysfunctional patterns they are trapped in. Schein ascribes ultimate power to the consultant, who achieves this.

I imagine that Susan, when she invited Dacapo, was thinking of us as a kind of process consultancy. Because we were using theatre we could help her to bring liveliness into the work, but without really changing perceptions of this kind of consultancy.

3.4 The training sessions

When I saw the programme for the first module I was close to cancelling our participation. What these people had to do seemed so overly planned that I wondered how we could ever be of any help.

They were supposed to do the first four steps over the two days:

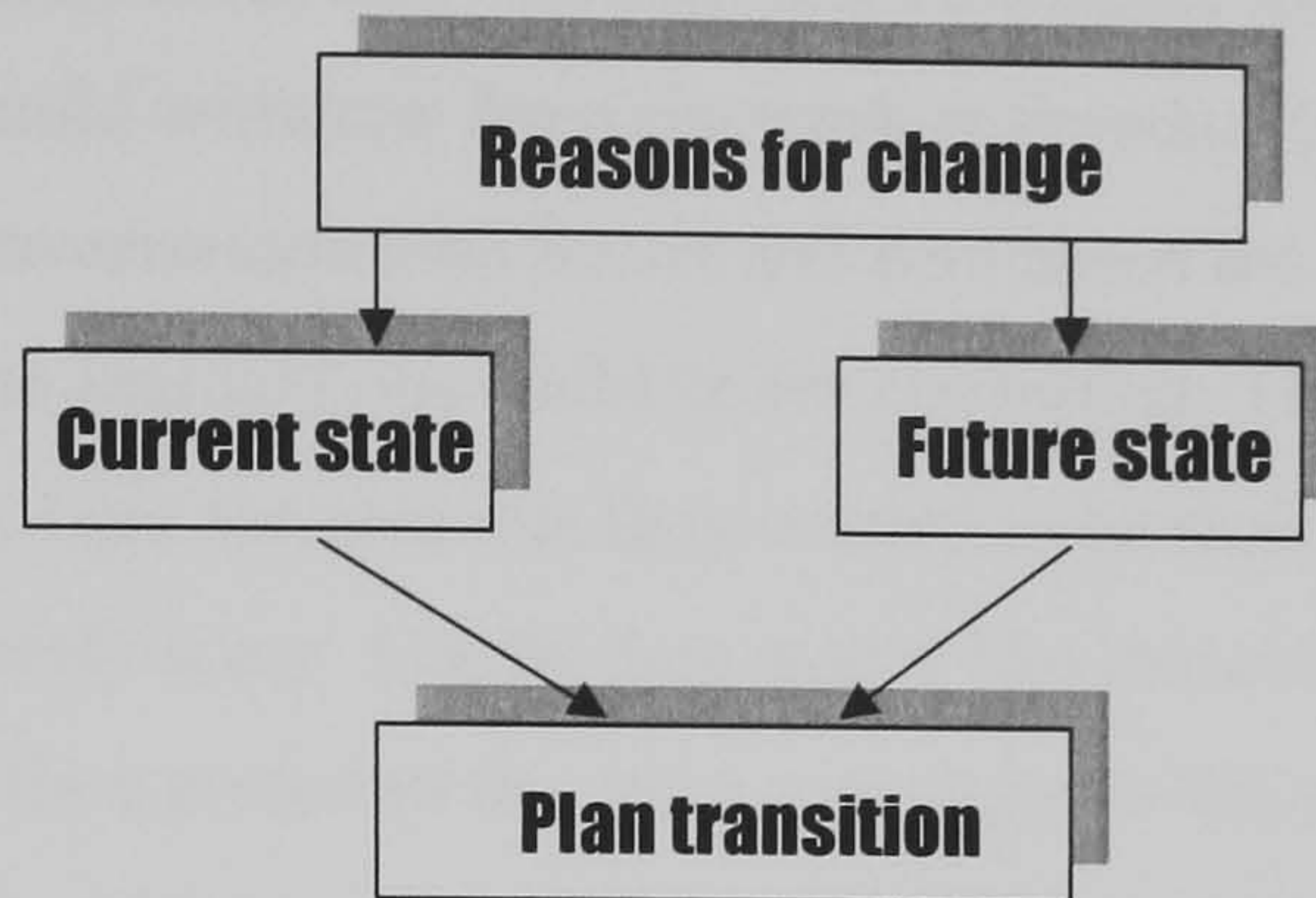


Figure 4: The first steps

However, we worked with them on a theme we had agreed with Susan as ‘managerial presence’. We asked them what they imagined their workers’ thoughts were, now that they were away, and what they would tell them on their return the next day.

The two days were repeated with another cohort and with the same actors, but with another person from Dacapo acting as consultant. As expressed in one of the actor’s notes:

We heard two different statements. From the day with the consultant that I would say has a gesture–response understanding of communication, the audience reflected in the end by saying things like: ‘We will have to accept that employees in a process like this will get conflicting information. There is no way to avoid it – we will have to take the time to talk with people. And we cannot prevent that some people make up their own stories from what they hear – again we just have to keep on talking.’

After the day with the sender–receiver model people reflected: ‘We need to be sure that everybody gets the same information. And we must improve our capacity to communicate so that we are sure that people really understand what we are saying.’ It may seem a small difference whether you think of communication as sender–receiver or as gesture–response – most people are not aware what model is behind their way of communicating – but it may lead to quite different ways of managing change.

Susan was very fond of the other consultant. They communicated well, and I am quite sure that if she had been asked she would have preferred to work with him the whole way through instead of me. There is no doubt that talking about communication from the sender–receiver model was more in line with her way of

working. I had conversations about this with my actor colleague, and we even talked about whether I should withdraw from the work at Frendas. But at the same time I was involved in conversations with Susan and Ann about the differences in our approach, and what the implications could be for consulting. They seemed to really enjoy this part of it. I got the idea that they wanted to be challenged, at the same time as it was obviously scary. Maybe they would like these discussions to continue, but at the same time preferred the other consultant as the one to work with because they felt safer with him. We did not allow them to choose, but continued to rotate consultants on the second and third modules.

3.4.1.1 Situational leadership

We continued the work with the training course, and I will mention a few incidents from the last module. We had been talking about the theme ‘improvisation and presence’, but it ended with the theme ‘situational leadership’, and we were supposed to work within the framework of leadership styles (Hersey and Blanchard, 1977).

This theory suggests that leadership style should be matched to the maturity of the employees. Maturity is assessed by the manager in relation to a specific task, and has two parts:

- Psychological maturity – people’s readiness to accept responsibility.
- Job maturity – people’s skills and technical knowledge.

As the maturity of the employee increases, leadership should be more relationship-motivated than task-motivated. According to the model, leadership can consist of:

- *Delegating.*
- *Participating.*
- *Selling ideas to subordinates.*
- *Telling subordinates what to do.*

As a manager you should choose your leadership style to suit the specific situation. For the leadership to become 'situational' you need an ability to read the situation clearly and apply the correct style. I find it very difficult to accept this way of using the word 'situational'. In this context it means behavioural design. Obviously as the manager you are supposed to be in control, to diagnose and define the situation correctly.

The other consultant from Dacapo had been using this framework in an earlier job at IBM, and he was keen to do so here, too. He had some archetypal situations described on paper, and the actors could play these employees, so the participants could try out their situational leadership abilities on them. Before this work they were introduced to the theory, and each of the participants had to do a test in 'leadership style efficiency and flexibility'. Susan was very satisfied with the first day and wanted me to copy it.

I did not like it. The conversation between Susan and myself mentioned just after the prologue, where I found us repeating our usual arguments, is about this theme. My actor colleague and I also discussed this intensely. I think that being brought into this situation provoked me to think about how to give room for other things to happen than simply learning how to use this model. We started our day by arranging people in a circle of chairs, inviting them into conversation with the question 'What do you think about management?' Almost immediately a very engaging conversation began about being a manager, how stressful it was right now, and also talking about the relations across the managerial hierarchy.

We were doing the training about situational leadership in smaller groups, with Ann, Susan and myself taking part in each of the groups. To my surprise it worked much better than I had expected. In this live situation, their planning about using a certain leadership style had to change, because the actor surprised them and they needed to react. The word 'situational' took on a much more interesting meaning, which became a theme for the conversation I was involved in with my group after the plays. Because they saw each other working live it also

became an invitation for the participants to continue the communication between the managers about how to handle daily situations.

3.4.1.2 Re-establishing the contact

This was our last participation in the managers' training programme. We had agreed to meet later for evaluation, but for various reasons we ran out of time. In the meantime the other consultant was fired from Dacapo. From his new company he had sent out information to some of our clients, and we assumed that he had contacted Susan as well. We decided that it was time to try to re-establish the contact with her. I wrote her an e-mail that served as an invitation to continue the conversation, addressing that the other consultant was not a part of the work in the future. She answered:

I was glad for the cooperation with [the other consultant], and I have definitely appreciated the cooperation with you and the others who contributed, too. I still think that we shall do more work together, but internally we need to find out where and about what we most need your participation.

These were the lines that I had interpreted as a hesitation about working together with us, as mentioned in the prologue. However, after this followed much work and the relationship is now very different from the one we had initially.

3.5 Improvisation and role

I have several times indirectly mentioned the notion of role. What role does Susan expect me to take? What do I expect myself? How are roles changing as we improvise? How did they actually change in the work we have been doing together at Frendas?

We use the word 'role' very broadly in our language. Of course it is a word used much in theatre, and so it is of importance in our understanding of improvisation. Role cannot be understood without relationship, where we recognise each other. If nobody reacts to what you are doing, it is not possible to talk about a role you are taking. In theatre a player can take a role on stage, without other players, but without the audience, or the expectation of an audience, it doesn't make sense to

talk about a role at all. How can we understand the roles we take and give each other in the interactions with Susan and others at Frendas?

In a scripted play the roles of the single player are carefully rehearsed. Seen from the audience, changes in relations will happen because this is a part of the drama, but the actors are aware of when it happens, and so nothing new is expected to happen to them when they are playing the script, although every new performance of the play will turn out slightly differently. In an improvised play, however, the relations might shift in an unpredictable way, and so also might the roles the actors play. If the roles are not able to shift, nothing new can happen. This indicates that we need to talk about roles as much less taken for granted and open to change than I think is usual in our language. As mentioned earlier (see Project 1), for Johnstone the role of the actor emerges in re-acting, so the roles of individual actors are not predetermined or stable, but emerge and change in relation to the other actors.

Taking this as an analogy, in the improvisational relations with people from Frendas, the roles each of us play are not predetermined or stable, although we often do expect them to remain the same. I came to the meeting mentioned in the prologue with an expectation that the roles we had in relation to each other before would be the same. At the meeting I sensed an invitation to relate differently, and this was important for what could happen in the situation.

We usually talk about role as what links a person, e.g. a manager, to the structure of the organization. In their approach to situational leadership Hersey and Blanchard (1977) assume that the manager can choose the right role independently of the response. Working with this it became obvious that it was not that simple; the ability to take a certain role as a manager is linked to the response and the ongoing iteration of the power relation.

In the following I will explore how social constructionists such as Goffmann, Berger & Luckmann and Gergen understand role and the possible changes roles can undergo.

3.5.1 The Presentation of Ourselves in Daily Life

Goffmann talks about the roles we take to each other in the relations we have in our daily lives in his book *The Presentation of Ourselves in Daily Life* ([1959] 1969). I think that the view he presents here has been widely influential, and also represents how we think about 'role' in everyday relations.

He argues that the key to our social relations to others is that each of us acts in an attempt to control the impressions others might get. We use certain techniques in order to sustain the performance. Here Goffmann draws an analogy with the way an actor presents a character to an audience, to be viewed either as a *performer* or as a *character*.

The *character* is an image of something that we want others to see.

A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to the performed character, but this imputation – this self – is a *product* of a scene that comes off, and it is not a *cause* of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited.

(Ibid: 252-3)

The self emerges as a performed character in relation to others, guided by a consideration of whether the character will be credited or discredited by others.

Behind this is the *performer* that has a capacity to learn. He is given to have fantasies and dreams, of triumphant performance or of anxiety in dealing with the audience. 'He often manifests a gregarious desire for teammates and audiences, a tactful considerateness for their concerns; and he has a capacity for deeply felt shame, leading him to minimize the chances he takes of exposure' (ibid: 253).

Goffmann notices what he calls a fundamental dialectic: An individual will try to discover the facts of the situation, working out what the others are doing. This is an impossible task since it would demand an ability to predict the outcome of the interaction as well as knowing their innermost feelings about him. Goffmann notices that, paradoxically, the less an individual knows about the others the more he will concentrate on how he appears to them, minimising self-exposure to limit the risk of being discredited.

Goffmann is talking about a special way of understanding the social construction of the roles we take, what we hide backstage and what we present. We play roles to present the self in a way that we think will serve us best, to give others a certain impression. We feel ashamed when people discover that the role we play does not represent the real person, and we become embarrassed when we see this discrepancy in the behaviour of other people.

But Goffmann's argument suggests that social relations only affect the roles we assume in front of each other. Behind this there seems to be an inner core of identity that remains unaffected by the relation – an identity we are not usually proud of, hence our need to adopt other roles when presenting ourselves. From this perspective conversation seems to be about presenting attractive roles to each other, and trying to find out information about how to do this most efficiently. A consequence of this way of thinking would be that improvisation can only result in a superficial game, where nothing can really happen unless, for some unknown reason, we are able to 'drop the masks' – which is a notion Goffmann uses. He ends with a kind of utopian wish that we could throw off the masks, without coming closer as to how this could be done.

This thinking assumes an understanding of identity as a more or less untouched core within each individual. 'Role' becomes false figures, playing out their assumed character's life independently from the identity of the actor. Communication becomes purely a superficial game.

3.5.2 Structure and roles

In their influential book, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), Berger and Luckmann also talk about roles. They build on Mead, but revise what he says about roles by trying to integrate what he says with the thinking of Durkheim:

..the fact (is) that Mead himself and his later followers did not develop an adequate concept of social structure. Precisely for this reason, we think, is the integration of the Meadian and Durkheimian approaches so very important.

(Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 194)

In their understanding, the self is only partially involved in the roles we take with each other. One can be a nephew-thrasher, a sister-supporter, an initiate-warrior, and take many other roles; but as an individual, one re-establishes distance from them by reflecting about the conduct afterward. This means that both the acting of self and acting of others are apprehended not as unique individuals, but as types. Berger and Luckmann says:

We can properly begin to speak of roles when this kind of typification occurs in the context of an objectified stock of knowledge common to a collectivity of actors. Roles are types of actors in such a context.

(Ibid: 73)

For Berger and Luckmann, the roles represent the institutional order, and the origin of the roles lie in what they call 'the fundamental process of habitualization and objectivization as the origins of institutions'. They continue by arguing that the structure defines the roles that can be taken. So even if one of their key arguments in the book is that social order is socially constructed, they continue to maintain that the structure creates the roles. In this way structure becomes reified, playing its own role. So the structure is socially constructed, and then the structure in turn constitutes the roles we take in society. Although different from Goffmann, this interpretation of role is similar in that it does not allow much freedom for the individual to play roles other than the one defined by the structure. I think that this reification of structure is not helpful in understanding the emergence of role and organizational relations.

3.5.3 Gergen on roles

Gergen seems to agree in this critique

Of major importance is the concept of the *social role*. From the symbolic interactionist's perspective, social life is played out in the roles we acquire, invent or are forced into. In this sense, if you look ahead in life you can see stretched out a structure of roles – teacher, therapist, manager, and the like, or wife, father, homosexual. Even the deviant from mainstream society – the drug addict, the thief or the 'mentally ill' – can be viewed as playing out scripts that are largely determined before we ever arrive on the scene.
(Gergen, 1999: 124)

Not surprisingly, Gergen calls this 'social determinism'. 'If you are causing my behaviour, are you not then both separate from me and have power over me?', Gergen asks rhetorically (ibid: 125). Gergen avoids talking about roles, which I find consistent. The notion of 'role' easily leads to a reification, as if the role is something that exists in itself. Gergen rejects reifications like this – that which happens between us is socially constructed.

He ends the chapter named '*Towards relational selves*' by writing:

Whatever we are, from the present standpoint, is either directly or indirectly with others. There is no fundamental reason to be 'self-seeking' or to threaten others as instruments for self gain. We are made up of each other. Nor do we find ourselves confronting the problem of earlier relational theorists, to wit the self is the product of others, a mere *effect* of the social surrounds. From the present standpoint there is no cause and effect, we are mutually constituting.
(Gergen, 1999: 137-8)

As mentioned earlier, a key point for Gergen is what he calls 'linguistic shading', which he sees as our attempt to coordinate discourse in conversation. By this he means that we hide the risky words behind other words, such as shading 'love' by calling it 'attraction'. This shading allows for transformation – where novelty might occur.

Although I can see that linguistic shading can contribute to new ways of talking, it is hard for me to accept it as the key to human communication, at least in the sense that Gergen proposes. Also I hear the notion of 'linguistic shading' in terms of

the communication model referred to as 'sender–receiver'. If I send my message linguistically shaded, this is an opportunity for common ground. I read the following sentence in the same line: 'I am all too skilled in blaming others if something goes wrong; in this sense I am not relationally responsible. I fail to use an option that would avoid driving a wedge between me and the other' (ibid: 164). In the end it seems to rely on the capacity of the individual to avoid conflict. Summary of the three authors:

- For *Goffmann* the only way to achieve spontaneity is to 'throw off the masks', assuming that there is a better world behind them. This way of thinking implies an existing reality and an untouched core of identity for the actors that I cannot accept.
- In trying to understand organizational structure, *Berger and Luckmann* end with a two-stage model. First the structure is socially constructed, then it seems to take on a life of its own. This structure then defines or determines the roles, which for Berger and Luckmann are types of actors in the structure. They do not explain how the role might change. I argue that we create and maintain the structure in relating, at the same time as we recreate and change the roles we take and give to each other. Therefore I do not accept such a two-level model.
- *Gergen* is sceptical about the notion of role. We mutually constitute each other's position, he says. Here I can agree, and I am strongly tempted to follow him in abandoning role as a useful term in understanding relationships. However, he then continues, claiming that harmony is crucial for the emergence of spontaneity, and power is more or less absent in his approach. This does not resonate with my experience, and I do not agree with the way he tries to explain how this mutual constitution comes about.

The issue clearly concerns the individual and the social. Although all the authors are genuinely interested in this, I think that each of them in their own way basically understand communication in the sender–receiver mode.

3.5.4 Taking the role of the other

Mead offers another explanation of communication, which is taken up by Griffin, Shaw and Stacey speaking of what they refer to as complex responsive processes. Gesturing by one person cannot be separated from response, and the meaning emerges as responding. This calls forth new gesturing. This is what I see in theatre improvisation where the actor's improvising emerges as 're-acting', i.e. responding/gesturing. In understanding and misunderstanding at the same time, identity, novelty and change emerge. Conflicts, agreements and misunderstandings are what relating and the emergence of identity and novelty are about. Meaning is conversation; new meaning is created as conversation. I think that this way of understanding communication completely shifts our attention. Communication is no longer a tool for sending a message of what is understood but an experience of what the movement of sense-making, emergent identity, change and novelty are about.

Gergen writes concerning Mead:

For Mead, one is born into the world as a private subject, and as a private subject must come to 'experience' other, and then, mentally 'take the role of the other', in order to develop processes of higher thought. Private subjectivity is never really abandoned in the formulation. Communication is from one individual subjectivity to another. Further, symbolic interactionism poses the intractable problem of explaining how it is a person is able to grasp other's states of minds from their gesture. If I am a child, and my father raises his hand, how do I know what this gesture means to him?

(Ibid: 124-5)

Gergen calls Mead a social determinist. He claims that according to Mead the roles people can take are defined by the attitudes of others. Gergen seems to understand Mead in the frame of communication as messages from a sender to a receiver, and what I see as key in Mead's way of arguing is not recognised by Gergen. In Mead's terms gesture cannot be seen as isolated from response, and Mead works with an essentially social understanding of self.

For Mead role is important, but I would argue that it is a very different concept of role. In a note about this, Mead defines social intelligence as:

...the given individual's ability to take the roles of others or 'put himself in the place of' the other individuals implicated with him in given social situations, and upon his consequent sensitivity to their attitudes towards himself and toward one another.

(Mead, 1934: 141)

Social intelligence is for Mead the ability to take the roles of others, to put one's self in others' places, indicating that role is not fixed but highly flexible. Here I see a connection to Johnstone when he talks about 're-acting'. For Mead a 'me' emerges, based on an ability to adopt the attitude of others, which Mead calls taking the role of the other. Recognition is important here. When 'me' meets challenge, new ways of understanding, it will be a part of the unpredictable way 'I' come to act – in a continuous 'conversation' with 'me'. For Mead this internal conversation is not different from conversation with others: both happen in the present. Mead talks about private and public roleplays. The private roleplay consists of gestures made by a body to itself, which according to Mead, constitute mind, and the social relationships and gestures made by bodies to other bodies, which constitute mind and social relationships. They are essentially the same process, namely, the conversation of gestures in significant symbols. They emerge simultaneously, and the only difference is that one is public and the other private.

3.6 Re-reading Project Three

The key theme in this project is meeting difference, as a consultant. My relationship with Susan has become the ongoing story; this is not by coincidence, it has influenced other relationships I have had in the ongoing change that has appeared in our ways of working. The work with Susan and Frendas Con-D has become a long-lasting relation that has changed over time. In the next project our participation in a follow-up on the management training programme is mentioned, and it will be obvious that the themes of discussion between us have changed.

It is not simply that, Susan as the client or I as a consultant solely defines what is going on. One situation that comes back several times in the project is working with situational leadership. It would be easy to explain Susan's reaction as resulting from her being the internal consultant who works from a humanistic psychology approach, under the conditions of a management implementing a strategic plan. In the e-mail I sent to my colleagues after one of my discussions with Susan, we agreed that we should work with what might happen when the managers meet the workers to explain about the plan. This can be read both in terms of Bridges' concept of transition and in terms of my concept of time, where the current work will inevitably change the past, including our way of understanding the change process and the goals set. I can see how Gergen's notion of 'linguistic shading' might be a reasonable way of understanding how we could continue our communication. However, the power relation between us in this specific situation is essential for understanding the linguistic shading: I saw, and still see, a high risk of losing the relationship altogether. I do not see the linguistic shading in itself as what enables us to continue the relationship further; it merely avoids breaking the relationship in a given situation. The other side of the paradox is that there was still some uncertainty about what this meant for us together in the work. In working with it, both our discussion and the work done by the other consultant became gestures to which I had to find a response, by working in an open format, which Susan was hesitant about. In doing the 'situational' training, it became alive, giving 'situational' a meaning that resonated with my understanding of the word. This surprised me, and I had to admit that it became much more interesting than I had expected, partly because everybody had to face the challenge of working in front of an actor, in the presence of other managers.

In understanding this I think that taking each other's perspective (in Mead's words, to take the attitude of the other) is simultaneously co-creating not just each individual identity, but also what we are doing together. As evident from the prologue, the roles shift as we do this – not because of the linguistic shading, but because of the risk of taking a step without knowing where it will lead. Susan and I could take these steps together, possibly because she was in a specific power rela-

tion with her colleagues, but also because of our common experience: even if it was difficult, it had also been fruitful. By this I am saying that Susan's invitation to spontaneity happened not because she forgot her experience or her intentions, but because she chose to take the risk. Taking such spontaneous actions will inevitably feel risky, because they are taken in the context of specific power relations. 'Meeting difference' has influenced both of us, not by establishing a common core of meaning, but through the ongoing conversation in which we can take each other's attitude and find resonance; and through this we ourselves change in response to the intention and the spontaneous action in which we find ourselves.

4 Theatre and organizational change, Project Four, June 2004

4.1 Prologue

On stage Rosa, an actor playing a cleaner, comes into the senior manager's office. She walks around, does a bit of work, looks shortly at the actor playing the manager, and starts to work again. The second time she passes him she looks a bit longer at the manager, who is busy with his papers on the desk, and she says: 'May I ask a question?'

The manager – played by another actor – looks up, surprised. He was hardly aware she was there, and says 'of course'. She hesitates, then looks firmly at him and says: 'Why are you doing this?' 'Doing what?' he responds. 'Why am I not allowed to wear this logo any more?' She points at her chest. The manager hesitates: 'Your manager was supposed to tell you about that', he says. 'Haven't you been a part of the decision?' she asks. As the words start to flow Rosa becomes gradually more direct: 'Are you not satisfied with my work?'

The manager takes a look in his papers on the desk and gives her a short glance. He picks up his papers. On his way out he says: 'You need to talk with your manager about this'. The scene ends with Rosa standing alone in the office.

We are working in a scouts' cabin in the woods. Eighteen managers from a company creating furniture in Danish Design are gathered here today. Their company have their 30th anniversary next year. Amongst the participants are three brothers, who jointly own the company. They inherited it from their mother, who had run it after the father's death until her sudden death four years ago. The older brother is the CEO, the younger has the responsibility for a promising department. The middle brother is responsible for HR management in the company, and he is our contact.

This is the third day in the scouts' cabin. We had done two days with the front-line managers in the last month, and the work had been difficult. We were supposed to work with what they called 'the sharing of knowledge'. We played some stories, but when they were supposed to work with them, they avoided this in comments like: 'The play is OK, but it is of no use, it does not help in any way'. Gradually we had realised that many were unsure about each other, but especially about the brothers, and many did not want to share knowledge about what it meant to them to be a manager. An important theme turned out to be the outsourcing of the company's cleaning. The decision to take this step had been taken a short time before we worked with them, and had caused much uncertainty and criticism amongst the workers. The front-line managers were not told about the decision, and some of them found themselves in a situation where they had to face angry workers without knowing what had happened. They found themselves giving unsatisfactory answers, and some of them had even told their people that this could not be true. We discussed our experience of the first two days with the middle brother, and he reacted very strongly when he heard about the problems. He expressed his disappointment about it. Obviously he had difficulty accepting the difficulties. He had been personally responsible for the decision, and felt that he had ended up with a very good deal for the cleaners with the outsourced company.

Now we are introducing this theme for senior management. As we role-play the situation with Rosa, I watch the three brothers. The middle brother is very nervous, in contrast to his two brothers. In the middle of the play, the older one chats with the guy beside him, and what goes on obviously does not capture his interest, a minute before he had got up from his chair and walked around. Also the youngest brother does not seem to be very engaged, although his reactions are less ostentatious.

It is the first time I have seen all three brothers together, and in this moment I come to think that the middle brother took a considerable risk in inviting us to do this. His reasons had been something like, 'If the company is to survive, and be

able to continue production in Denmark, people need to be better able to work together and be willing to share their knowledge with each other'. He had invited us because he had realised that for some reason this was not happening, or at least not enough. At this moment, there does not seem to be much support from his brothers, and this is perhaps not only about the theme we are working with, but also about the way we are working, namely using theatre.

In the same moment I could understand why the middle brother reacted so vigorously when he heard about the reaction from front-line managers regarding the outsourcing of the cleaning. He is well known in business circles for taking a socially responsible approach, for instance by bringing in people of foreign origin and disabled people. Maybe these initiatives, although passively accepted by the other brothers, were not seen as very important by them; maybe this made it more difficult for him to accept all the trouble in the rest of the company.

This goes through my head while Rosa is standing in the office alone. I ask the participants how they feel about the way the manager handled the situation with her. Nobody says anything for a short moment. 'Of course he will have to give her an explanation. He can't just leave', says the youngest brother. He expresses himself as if this is obvious, as if it is a fact, and as if just saying this will rectify the situation. He is obviously used to people not challenging him when he speaks like that.

I invite him to try it on stage. He had not expected that. I interpret the look in his face as, 'Oh, that's the game you are playing; why didn't you tell me?'. It is obvious for me that he would have preferred to stay seated, but he gets up. I get the idea that it would have been too embarrassing for him to say no.

On stage he becomes extremely nervous. He tries to joke, says that this is just theatre, that it is completely unrealistic with all these people watching. Rosa asks him the same question as before, and he tries to answer - still completely focussed on the people in the audience. It is obvious that he really would like to get out of

this situation, and I am very close to intervening. Then Rosa – or Lena the actor – leans over, and tells him not to take any notice of these people. There are just the two of us, she says. She does not allow him to respond, because Rosa then takes the initiative and begins to ask questions that demand answers, questions like: ‘Are you not satisfied with the quality of my work?’ ‘Are we too expensive?’ ‘Will it become cheaper after the outsourcing?’ Gradually he begins to answer her questions. She questions again until she understands the answers. He becomes more and more engaged in really answering her, and the more he concentrates on that, the better it goes. When he leaves the stage Rosa obviously understands a bit more about the outsourcing. People are applauding him, and he seems OK, although a bit shaken.

4.2 Introduction

Over the last few years, there has been a change in how we work in the Dacapo Theatre. The company mentioned in the prologue were using the Dacapo Theatre two years ago. At that time we were working with everyone on the shop floor and we were doing this over a span of time, meeting a certain number of people each time. When the Dacapo Theatre did this job, it was highly unusual for us to do more than a one-day event with our clients.

Meeting the company this time, we are not meeting only shop-floor people; instead, we are working with managers at all levels, and we are working over a span of time with a combination of these people. In the last year, we have had more jobs working with managers than before, and not many one-day events.

However desirable, this change is not easy. Although it can be very encouraging to meet the same people again, it is also a huge challenge for the way we are working with theatre. Becoming more involved in a relationship with our clients makes it more important to reflect on what we are doing and understand our contribution in the ongoing work. The first meeting might have been easy, funny and stimulating, but coming back can be more difficult. In the work with the furniture company we have experienced a growth of anxiety because they could not reduce

the work to just meeting us one day. This change influences the way I think about our work, and my relationship with the actors. Interestingly, although I worked as a consultant before I started in the Dacapo Theatre, working with the same clients over years, this feels different – maybe because I am working with theatre, together with actors. This change in our work creates tensions and problems in my relationship with the actors, which has its ups and downs.

What I intend to work with in this project is the following:

1. To explore the contribution of theatre in organizational change. What is the nature of this kind of consultancy? I will resume my focus from the previous projects, where I explore how change in power relations prompts organizational change, and at the same time changes in the identity of the interdependent people and in the work they are doing together. All participants contribute and nobody can predict or control the outcome, although what emerges is usually not completely surprising. I see our work with theatre contributing to this because it necessarily involves an invitation to risk changes in power relations, by appealing to spontaneity. This view will be contrasted with other discourses that I see as influential in literature and my daily life for understanding working with theatre in organizational change processes. A prevailing assumption in other approaches is to see theatre as a laboratory, a test run for later ‘real’ work. I will argue that this is not so: change happens as an integral part of the process.
2. In the light of this I explore the way we are working with theatre in the following themes:
 - i. The power relations among actors and consultant are enabling and constraining the work we do with clients. I look at the particularisation of this in my relation to the actors I am working with, as the work we are doing is changing, and how the work we do together challenge our identity as consultants and actors.
 - ii. As a part of this I will reflect on the power of theatre. Theatre can be very real when creating fictitious situations and characters on

stage. I will explore how this happens, and at the same time seek to understand the conditions required for it to take place.

- iii. In doing their work a certain risk is taken by actors. What is the nature of this, and what does it take to be able to work in this way?

4.3 Improvised theatre challenges power relations

Here I will resume the approach of understanding theatre as we are doing it, by exploring the situations described in the prologue.

4.3.1.1 The roots of Boal, and how I deal with it

- For Boal the audience is ‘the oppressed’, and he is creating a ‘we’ situation with a kind of universal consensus in the audience about a common oppressor. Here the audience were managers, and taking Boal seriously we either could define the cleaner as the oppressor, look for external oppressors that are recognised by both parties, or reject working with this audience. I do not, however, see any audience as an entity with one intention and one oppressor. In the work related in the prologue we are working with conflicts between different participants in the audience. The cleaner is not the problem, but the situation initiates an important theme about ethics and what it means to be a manager.
- Boal assumes that when an audience actively engages in a play by proposing solutions, this serves as a test-run for problems that are encountered in real life. It is usually assumed that engaging in solving the problem motivates the participants to engage in similar problems in real life (Boal, [1979] 2000, Meisiek, 2004a). This assumes that the real work goes on afterwards; implying that the work we are doing in the prologue is not real. However, I saw a real and actual shift happening in the relations between the younger brother and Rosa which had implications for the ongoing relations with the others in the room. I will call this in itself a ‘change’, not merely a test-run for something to take place later. Rosa may exist only on

stage, but the relation between her and the youngest brother is real, as it influences and involves a shift in his relation to others.

- For Boal the role of the joker is to ask Socratic questions, through which ideas already present in the audience are expressed. In the situation in the prologue, however, new ideas emerged that did not exist before. In my position as what Boal would call ‘the joker’, the most critical moment was when I sensed new ideas about what was going on between the three brothers, ideas that inevitably influenced my way of reacting to the emerging situation. I see myself as participating in an ongoing process, not trying to bring forth a pre-existing idea. Consequently, my role cannot be that of a ‘midwife’, i.e. giving birth to what was already conceived in people’s minds.

4.3.1.2 Theatre improvisation and links to understanding organizational life as complex responsive processes of relating

In contrast to this ‘before and after’ thinking, I resonate strongly with Johnstone’s concept of theatre improvisation introduced in Project 1. Lena reacted to the nervous brother and her response changed significantly from the way she had responded to the actor who played the role before. This time Rosa assumed a much higher status in response to the new situation. In doing so, she could not know how he would react, and she had to improvise; but since she is a skilled and experienced actor in this kind of work, she knows that usually something worthwhile will happen as a result.

As mentioned in Project Three, I came to see an organization not as something ‘being there’ in a reified sense, but as ‘being there’ because when we talk and relate to each other, we are patterning communication and action as we interact with each other in daily life, in the same way that a scene emerges during theatre improvisation.

As mentioned in Project Three, by being involved in local interactions in daily life, referred to by Stacey, Griffin and Shaw as complex responsive processes, we

create and recreate our identity at the same time, just as the relationships among actors in theatre improvisation create their roles and the situation through continuous reaction. Obviously this involves spontaneity since we cannot predict what we are supposed to respond to and so we do not know in advance what to answer. However in many situations we control our spontaneity, and find others and ourselves in situations that we think we have been in before, patterns we can recognise. I had never seen the youngest brother before, and I could not know how people would respond to his remarks about Rosa just before I asked him to go on stage. However, it would have surprised me if anyone had commented on his remarks, as I sensed a controlling of spontaneity in their bodily reaction, and I felt it myself. Stacey talks about spontaneity, not as pure impulse but as 'a skilful, reflective capacity to choose different responses, developed in the life history of interaction' (Stacey, 2004b: 13). It felt natural that nobody reacted, and I think that the patterning of extremely constraining interdependency that emerged in this situation felt familiar: people had tried it before. There seemed to be no opportunity for others to choose different reactions, maybe because of a fear of exclusion because the power relations between them felt too threatening. I think that I was able to notice this because I recognised a specific way of talking, and their bodily reactions were familiar to me.

This changes when the youngest brother goes at stage. The patterning of interdependency that apparently had happened many times before is not possible in this situation, because he actually meets Rosa in front of all these people; and because he cannot get away with not answering her, he has to act spontaneously. Change is happening, and people made sense of this in the flow of present experience, not as a separate process. I have come to closely link spontaneity to risk-taking since it inevitably involves change in power relations: the youngest brother is nervous because his spontaneous reactions might influence the power relations which are his world of meaning.

So, working with theatre has contributed to a change in the patterning of conversation. Exactly how this will emerge we cannot know. As it becomes obvious that

it also involves the relation between the brothers, it takes a new turn. Introducing fiction, e.g. Rosa, contributes because the fictitious situation had become 'real' or 'true', how the youngest brother dealt with it paradoxically both confirmed and probably shifted the configuration of power relations among the people present. Momentarily something changed, for instance the brothers' relationship and the difficult situation that the one brother found himself in. This emerged very powerfully, and that I was not the only one to experience.

In the flow of all this I sensed a conversational change. A change in the patterning of conversation is consequently organizational change, enabled by the risk-taking of the youngest brother's response to the gesture of Rosa. In using the notion of risk-taking here, I understand risk as spontaneity in the face of power differentials, spontaneity not as pure unreflected impulse, but rather as finding oneself reacting in an unforeseen way, not carefully planned but still against the history of awareness of the other in context.

4.3.1.3 Change I noticed as a part of our work

The younger brother was completely surprised and embarrassed, but found a way of participating. Moving from a detached position, he suddenly became involved in something that he could not escape. By experiencing how difficult it actually was to talk with Rosa, he changed his understanding of the theme; by this I do not mean that he changed his opinion about whether the decision to outsource was wrong, but he realised that talking about it was much more complex than he had anticipated.

Also I sensed a shift in the power configuration between the brothers. The middle brother was in a difficult position, and he was nervous. When the younger brother became involved, it immediately created another power configuration between them. By this I do not mean that what happened on stage had consequences that are to be understood sequentially – that is, something happening first on stage that later had an impact upon the relationship. As he was relating to Rosa his relationship with the brothers was also in 'play', and was changing at the same time. Of

course I cannot know how this will turn out later. Still, I perceive this as organizational change.

Later the same day the older brother asked for some time to talk about what was supposed to happen shortly afterwards. Negotiations about the work conditions were planned, and he wanted time to explain what the intentions were and why he, as the CEO, thought that this was important. He had not intended to talk about this before coming on this day, but a shift had taken place in his way of thinking, because he had now become more involved, and this had influenced his thinking about the responses he could expect from the others. He had been able to see things from their perspective, and this had changed his decision about when it would be appropriate to involve them in the plan.

I came to think that the three brothers usually spent a lot of time agreeing with each other, and they made an effort to present clearly defined roles among themselves to the rest of the organization. Here the other participants came to see one of the brothers acting live. It was every bit as convincing, as 'real' as anything else going on in the organization that day: it happened, and could not be undone. It was powerful, and it may therefore have changed their thinking about the reactions of one of the owners.

4.3.1.4 Role in our relating in daily life

This leads me to reflect on the way I understand the notion of role. As mentioned in Project Three, we usually talk about role as something that links a person, such as a manager, to the structure of the organization. We then easily come to see 'the structure' as a player in itself. In contrast to this way of thinking, I understand structure as being there only because we continue to recreate it. The three brothers had agreed about each of their roles in the organization, in order to avoid confusion about who would take decisions about what; and they had clarified this to others in the organization. But in the situation with Rosa I think that the differences, conflicts and potential disagreements among the brothers could not be controlled, so the way they usually perceived each other and the way the others perceived them were potentially reconsidered. Their routine expectations of each

other, and their expectations of what the others expected of them were brought to life in a way which made change possible. In Project Three I examined different social constructionists' way of understanding role, namely Goffmann ([1959] 1969) (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) and Gergen (1999). For all of them the issue of role is the relationship between the individual and the social; but I think that each of them, in their own way, basically understands communication as the transmission of signals from a sender to a receiver who then works with these signals internally and then transmits other signals. This splits sense-making and individual identity from the communication that is going on, and so any change in roles or in the identity of those involved can happen only as a *consequence* of communication – separate from it, not as a direct part of the communication process. Mead (1934) is radically different on this topic. For him, communication and action among people actually constitutes the organization, its values and actions, and the identity of those involved, as life-process. Change does not happen as a consequence of communication but as part of human communication and interaction, and consciousness is a reflexive, social phenomenon. Mind is the same bodily process as the social; it is private conversation with oneself, whilst the social is public conversation. Gesture and response then become one social act in which meaning is constantly being negotiated, as the negotiation of our own identity. By taking another's viewpoint and acting spontaneously you enact self-awareness, and form self-consciousness.

This resonates very well with the way I have here described my understanding of what happened amongst all of us in the situation in the prologue. Introducing Rosa changes the way negotiation of meaning can be talked about. Mead uses role in the context of taking the role of the other, i.e. putting oneself in another's place. He considers this to be what differentiates humans from other living creatures. Role-taking becomes the discipline of becoming the other, as a way of taking into account what is felt, understood and perceived by the other. In these terms the use of theatre in organizations is a way of calling attention to see what is going on from another's perspective; as happened in the case of the older brother.

4.3.1.5 Risk-taking as an actor

In the situation with the younger brother, new conversation emerged. As conversation develops routine everyday patterns it is perceived as risky to ask the kind of questions which the actress in the role of Rosa asked because they would represent a direct challenge to power relations. This is not unique to the situation in the prologue. I have found that the actors' work enables conversation to change in many other situations, even when it does not involve a non-actor on stage.

In this project I will try to come closer to what it takes for an actor to do this kind of work – something that is obviously very important for us. Basically the actors see this as their skill, and not as risk-taking in itself. However, as a non-actor I find that by doing this work risks are taken, and I will return to this.

4.3.1.6 Conclusion so far

I am arguing for understanding organization as conversation, by which I mean ongoing interdependent action and communication between people. In this meaning, identity and change is created, not by design, but by continuous ongoing responses to each other's gestures. These both change and constitute power figurations in which each of us have intentions that also shift as together we shape a sense of what is going on. Theatre can call forth emotions that forcefully enable people to identify with the characters and situations on stage. Playing situations gives a unique opportunity to take the attitude or role of others, because you see more, and get involved. This means that the work influences people's own self-consciousness. Theatre can create situations that invite people to take action in which what they perceive as their own power position is put at risk; but because it is going on in 'fiction' it is perceived as less risky. However, there is only one process and theatre is a part of this, not something going on beside the real. In the immediate response the audience are co-creating a response of their own. Therefore the work with theatre is not artificial or 'pseudo' real - not a vicarious experience in this sense - but a real one. Change means change in power relations, and invitations to change are fundamentally risky because they challenge the identity of those involved; so, in doing our work, we too are running risks. The nature of

these risks concerns our specific relation to our clients, and at the same time this challenges our identity.

With this in mind, the next chapter turns to how authors from other main discourses take the effects of organizational theatre into account.

4.4 Other discursive accounts of the effects of organizational theatre

In recent years there has been a strong focus on how the arts can contribute to the development of business and organizations (Darsø, 2004). In light of this, it is not surprising that theatre has been used more widely in organizations, as documented by Schreyögg (2001) and Meisiek (2002).

Here I will focus on the use of theatre in organizations, especially forum theatre and other kinds of improvised theatre that involve the audience, by looking at three papers that approach this from different discourses. Two of these are actually about work done by the Dacapo Theatre. I see the discourses as:

1. Rational planning
2. Systems theory
3. Social constructionism

My focus will be on how each of these takes account of the possible effects of organizational theatre.

4.4.1 Forum theatre seen as a tool for reducing equivocality

Gulløv, who is part of a research team building on contingency theory, has written a paper where he reflects on Forum Theatre (Gulløv, 2003). Contingency theory works with the match between the situation of an organization and its structure, assuming that an optimal match can be found. This team has been working with ‘information processing systems’ (Burton et al., 1995) and they are interested in finding what they call prescriptive rules for the way a manager should handle information and communication. From this perspective Gulløv has examined work done by the Dacapo Theatre. The manager has a message to tell, and Gulløv is

interested in how forum theatre can contribute to this by reducing what he terms 'equivocality'.

If behaviour can be managed through self-realization by applying a high media richness such as theatre, we might be able to handle the adaptation of equivocal and ambiguous information in a more appropriate way by applying a media with high richness such as forum theatre.

(Gulløv: 8)

Obviously the manager here is assumed to stand outside, from where he is able to design an optimal response; and forum theatre is understood as a tool for this work. Gulløv refers to Nonaka's dynamic theory of organizational knowledge, which assumes that the knowledge is 'there', either explicit or 'tacit' and contained within the individual. He sees theatre work as a useful tool for externalising this knowledge – making it also explicit and social (Nonaka, 1991).

An interesting shift becomes apparent in his writing when Gulløv starts to reflect on what actually happened among the participants in the Dacapo Theatre's work:

By letting the audience interpret, discuss and respond (in terms of suggestions), this method enables multiple and emerging interpretations to engage in the discussion. Even themes that had not been touched upon in the play emerge, but they emerge because the audience relates their own experiences to the situations illustrated in the play.

(Ibid: 13)

Gulløv continues by saying that it is striking that the participants, not having any education in organizational theory can recognise and describe organizational problems and solutions intuitively.

I can recognise these observations from my own work. Themes emerge, multiple interpretations are spoken of, many seem to be able to participate at the same time, and people seem to be able to communicate about highly complex themes. However, Gulløv does not reflect on how and why this changes the manager's ability to control the outcome.

Gulløv requested comments on his paper, and I discussed it with him for some hours. I realised that what had prompted him to write the paper was the liveliness

he had experienced among the participants. In our discussion I tried to encourage him to explore what I saw as a controversy between his observations and his theoretical basis. He became interested in the question, without, however, actually changing his paper.

Gulløv understands the work with theatre as something apart from reality – a kind of laboratory work that is interesting, but has to be followed by ‘real’ work, because ‘the limitation of the forum theatre technique is that the actual climate and culture of the organization still has to be changed’ (ibid: 16). Change takes place afterwards, and the liveliness that Gulløv observes is not seen as part of change in itself.

4.4.1.1 Reflecting on the approach seen in this paper

Gulløv articulates his discourse very clearly, and so the dissonance between his discourse and what he observes becomes obvious for me. I am convinced that the liveliness that he describes and finds promising would disappear if we took this approach to working with theatre. I see the unpredictability, diversity and emergence of themes that appear to be important for the audience as essential. The approach to understanding knowledge not as some ‘thing’ which is ‘there’ to be made explicit, but as continuously created; of novelty, not something designed and implemented; of the role of the manager not as the grand designer, but as someone with their own intentions who, like anyone else, continues to be surprised when faced with others’ intentions. If Gulløv took his observations and feelings to their natural conclusion, I believe he would have to challenge his own discourse. I think he would have to accept, firstly, that implementing theatre as a tool in the way he proposes will remove the effect which interests him; and secondly, that the control he ascribes to the manager is not possible.⁹

⁹ This way of thinking has explicit implications for the consultant’s work. Gulløv remarks that ‘the communication is controlled by an external observer, who can realise and change the path of the discussion’ (Gulløv:13). It is not surprising that Gulløv perceives the position of the consultant as that of an external observer who can control the process. But in my experience the liveliness will disappear if one attempts such control. My experience is that people allow the consultant to do it, many will even expect it, but at the same time the quality of participation changes.

In the beginning of my work as a joker, I hesitated to intervene in the play. When I sensed an impulse to do so, I found myself waiting until I was able to articulate for myself why. In most situa-

4.4.2 Forum theatre seen as a tool for mapping underlying structure

Jagiello (1998) works with forum theatre as a tool for continuous learning in organizations. It is a safe environment to improve quality and forum theatre is seen as the answer to what she calls a key question in continuous improvement, namely involvement of the participants. She understands the effects of forum theatre from Senge's five learning disciplines of a 'learning organization': mental models, shared vision, systems thinking, personal mastery, and team learning (Senge, 1990). In line with this she says, 'forum theatre provides a learning laboratory for exploring how structure influences behaviour'. For Jagiello this thinking provides a language for talking about forum theatre; it works because the joker facilitates interventions, which enable the structure to support the behaviours needed to improve quality. In the forum work two modes of problem-solving are going on: either the problems are clarified in the eyes of the problem-owner, or afterwards there is an improvement in the dialogue or a personal interaction that leads to resolving the issue. Consequently, by doing forum theatre you gain knowledge that you can implement afterwards, because you now have more awareness of the influence of the structure you are working in.

tions, by then it was too late: in the seconds it took me to try to work out what was going on new things had happened, which meant the moment had passed. I found that I had to work hard and it was difficult to keep the flow, because people's response frequently took a different direction, with much less exploration and commenting, and more explaining and analysing. Also I found it difficult at those times to keep hold of several threads, because when I asked 'what happened?' (on stage), people surprised me by commenting on very different things from my own understanding. It then became a game where I either had to forget my argument for stopping or wait until a similar argument came from the audience. Still, when I could then make room for a particular explanation, people felt manipulated, and they would hesitate to continue their exploration.

Gradually I began to intervene when I felt an impulse to do so, without being able to articulate why. It feels risky, and in the beginning I remember thinking that if people asked me why I would not have been able to explain. But asking the same question, 'what is going on?' felt much easier, probably because people could sense that I was exploring as well. I have come to realise that what could seem like a small change in my way of doing my work meant a lot.

As I have reflected earlier, this does not mean that the consultant cannot have intentions or want something special to happen. He will, and so will the actors, but in the lively exchange of gestures the consultant cannot first observe, realise and then change the path of the discussion. If he tries to be in control he will inevitably find himself following behind what is going on, so he must work with his intention in a much less controlled way, where responses are given immediately and are in turn influenced by the responses that, in an equally immediate way, are evoked by other people's participation.

4.4.2.1 Reflecting on this approach

This way of thinking splits thinking and action, and here too the work with theatre is considered a 'laboratory'. The individual is seen as an independent entity, and change happens when this entity changes his mental model. Forum theatre is seen as a way of changing this mental model in the individual, learning is understood as a solely individual activity, and forum theatre enables learning because it elicits 'emotional learning'. Power relations are not understood as influencing organizational change. The joker is outside the process, enabling this to happen. Change take place directly in the work with theatre, but happens only afterwards, when we go from 'laboratory' to 'reality', where the real work is where the individual now recognises the importance of structure.

4.4.3 Systems thinking based on Luhmann

In Project One I mention Schreyögg, who understands theatre work in organizations as work with hidden conflicts, subconscious behavioural patterns and painful truths (Schreyögg, 2001). Using systems theory based on Luhmann (1998) he finds that working with theatre enables the spectators to practice what he calls 'second-order' observation, which for Luhmann is essential to learning. In an editorial Schreyögg goes further with this and says – together with Höpfl – that the dynamics of organizational theatre 'are likely to shake things into action or to "unfreeze" blocked situations. From this point of view it is like an intervention in organizational development' (Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004: 697). The term 'unfreeze' refers to Lewin (1941), who introduced the 'freeze, unfreeze, freeze' concept of change, in which the organizational behaviour is there, the system is disturbed by the consultant, and then it settles in a new order. In understanding this Schreyögg, with Höpfl, finds that the mechanistic logic of stimulus and predetermined response cannot match the complex nature of organizational theatre and its effects. Based on Luhmann, then, the argument can be stated as follows. Theatre enables the individual to split experience into the usual, familiar reality, and the theatrical reality as it appears on stage. This means that the individual becomes able to observe the habitual reality from an unfamiliar angle, a duplication that puts the familiar view into perspective and thereby makes it reflective. Observed

through the lens of the theatre experience, the familiar reality becomes contingent. It becomes obvious that it could be different, and that the alternative view is possible at least in principle; therefore views that were previously taken for granted become unfrozen. Referring to Weick (1995), the authors explicitly claim that the spectators 'work through this process on the basis of their own cognitive world and sense-making mechanisms' (Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004: 699). This view understands organization as reified and frozen, and change is understood as going on purely in the individual as a cognitive process, without power being involved.

4.4.4 Emotions in organizational theatre

In 2002 Meisiek (2002) published a work where he continued Schreyögg's line of thought. Here he also splits working with theatre from the process of reflection, and advocates following up with post-performance discussions to reinforce the effects of organizational theatre. In trying to understand the effect of theatre, he points to social sharing of emotions. He mentions research that claims that up to 90% of all emotional events are shared with others in everyday reality¹⁰. Theatre evokes emotions, and therefore it triggers social sharing of what people have just experienced. So, it is the later discussion that is seen to effect the change, and emotions are understood as private; the success comes if these emotions are shared afterwards. Writing later, Meisiek (2004a) points to *catharsis*¹¹ as the primary effect of organizational theatre, also this notion is understood as going on in the single individual.

4.4.5 A social constructionist perspective

A few years ago the Danish government initiated Learning Lab Denmark (LLD), which works around understanding learning in humans, schools, organizations etc. LLD is organised around consortia, one of which is called the 'Creative Alliance', focusing on the link between art and business. Because the Dacapo Theatre is well known in Denmark and has been widely used in Danish companies within the last

¹⁰ I see that Meisiek is understanding emotions as purely individual. I would say that emotions are essentially social; the question then is how this is explicitly talked about.

¹¹ In understanding the impact of theatre on spectators catharsis has been a theme since Aristotle, and also Boal works with it. I see catharsis in terms of an individualistic understanding of emotion, but I will not go further with it in this thesis.

10 years, there has from the beginning of LLD been an interest in exploring the work we are doing. Stefan Meisiek, as a member of this consortium, has been re-searching the impact of Forum Theatre in the way we do it at the Dacapo Theatre. By coincidence they have been writing about the same project as Gulløv: a work where forum theatre performances were arranged for the home helpers in a municipality in a series of performances over a span of a year (Meisiek, 2004b). He now finds that people are more satisfied with their work, and 'the performances stimulated a vivid dialogue among organizational members in their work life situations following the performance. The ongoing performances seemed to have kept this dialogue alive throughout the one-year period of time' (Meisiek, 2004: 19). Meisiek understands this in the terms described by Weick (1995), the employees are engaged in an outward directed, narrative sensemaking process, where they connect to the play with what they know.

In this study Meisiek found that 'the managers did relatively little to follow up on thoughts and ideas that the play could have elicited in the audience members. They made no concentrated effort to discuss the play in a group setting' (Meisiek, 2004b: 20). Since nobody apparently followed up the theatre work in a systematic way, Meisiek is looking for other ways to account for the effect:

A play can be regarded as a 'discardable.' In this 'inventing through discarding', the members of the audience are not supposed to be able to use the solutions shown on stage or elaborated in the interactive play in their everyday work life. While most change-management initiatives seem to work with affirmation – employees are supposed to understand the value of a new solution and accept it willingly – organization theater seems to thrive on rejection – the solutions presented are to be acknowledged as insufficient and to be replaced in an improvisational way in the everyday work life. This 'new' way is by no means clearly defined by the managers prior to the performance nor is it determined through the interaction on the day of the performance. Rather it develops further in the conversations around the play in the time following the theatrical performance.

(Ibid: 20)

He continues by defining the work with theatre as a *conversation piece*:

Around this conversation piece social action starts to spin, driven by the interests of the differently involved employees. This happens initially in the interactive part of the play and continues in the mundane talk that follows. The conversation piece therefore mediates social change, while it itself is at the same time discardable. Changes in the employees' beliefs and

values may be occurring, and these changes may be directly or indirectly linked to the theatrical performance.

(Ibid: 22)

Here Meisiek recognises that change might be going on already in the middle of the theatre work, and conversation is seen as central, both in line with my view.

Meisiek moves to understanding the contribution of the Dacapo Theatre as *serious play*. This idea can be traced to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). At Learning Lab Denmark, Meisiek has come into contact with David Barry, who had been involved in research about what he calls 'mediates'. By this he means prototypes, models and simulations used in innovation. Referring to prototype studies at MIT (Schrage, 2000), Barry reflects on this:

While we have always used mediates, the fact that we need to build many more bridges now, both to new futures and to new communities, combined with the increasing availability of highly sophisticated yet inexpensive mediate design tools, means that we will see an increasing proliferation of powerful mediating forms.

(Barry and Palmer, 2001: 10)

Using mediates like this is what Schrage calls serious play, and Barry mentions what he calls the importance of the playfulness – distinguishing between not taking things too seriously while we develop it, yet still being serious about what we are doing.

4.4.5.1 *Reflections on this thinking*

The notion of serious play seems an attractive way of understanding the effect of theatre in organizations. Theatre work is seen as a 'mediate' that triggers important conversation; forum theatre provides invention through rejection, by people negating what they have seen, but at the same time using the piece as a starting point for their conversation. This resonates with what I have earlier called a dialectical movement of thought, the Hegelian dialectic, further explored by Adorno ([1966] 2000) as negative dialectics. By interacting with each other, people are constructing their way of understanding what is going on, and the negation allows the emergence of novelty. Furthermore, it resonates with a response: I often hear from people working in organizations where we have been working with theatre

that characters in a play and situations we have worked with become a part of the language among people. This might support the view of our work as a conversation piece.

However, I see a difference in my way of thinking. In a discussion with Meisiek, Barry says:

So the play becomes a kind of trigger or catalyst. While nothing in it was directly used, the 'mediate' kicked off conversations, which somehow leads to organizational change. I'd like to briefly discuss a couple of terms that relate to organization theatre: 'mediates' and 'conversation pieces'. For me, these are both 'gobetweens', things which developmental psychologists have termed 'transitional objects'. The psychologists note, that children use transitional objects before developing language and that we continue using them as development tools throughout our lives: For the young child, a teddy bear can come to represent comfort, while for the engineer, a prototype represents possible production futures.

(Meisiek and Barry, 2004:
18)

The idea of transitional object was introduced by the psychologist Winnicott (1965) for understanding a child's separation from its mother and also later in life in arts, religion and in creating scientific work. For Winnicott a transitional object is an object that takes a particular meaning for the child and thereby enables the child to separate from the mother. The transitional object becomes an interface, a third, intermediate space, apart from other individuals, who are seen as separate entities (Stacey, 2003b: 233-9). This is different from Mead's understanding of human communication, where relating is seen to go on directly between people, not in a third space. Thus self is, for Mead, paradoxically social and private at the same time.

Seeing theatre as serious play does not regard it as a direct form of conversation, but as a third object, that as Barry says triggers or catalyses change. Theatre leaves the conversation piece in the communicative 'room' for people to continue with. It is as though theatre work is a tool that people have brought with them from the laboratory, rather like the toy that the child falls asleep with. I agree that the theatre work often becomes a theme in the ongoing conversation, and by this

has the kind of effect Meisiek is talking about; what I reject is understanding the work as a third object between people instead of seeing it as part of conversation, because thinking this way inevitably moves the attention away from the direct interaction that I argue is taking place.

4.4.6 Concluding on these approaches

Although they are very different, I see significant similarities among these approaches. Theatre is not seen as a part of conversation, understood as the interactions going on between people in an organization. Theatre comes from outside, and in itself is assumed to be unable to effect change. The explanations then become that theatre can be seen as:

- enabling ambiguous communication
- influencing the mental model of the individual
- influencing the emotions of the individual
- a serious play that people can use as a conversation piece, a thing to talk about.

In this light it is obvious that the notion of theatre as a kind of laboratory becomes very plausible: reality is split from this, as something that goes on afterwards. I accept that Meisiek recognises conversation as something that happens when we work with theatre but seen in the context of serious play I see a focus on the individual. It is surprising that the significance of power is more or less absent from all this writing, but in this light it becomes clear why this is so. If theatre is not understood as being a direct part of what is happening, it does not seem important to include thoughts about power, because no risks are taken by participants in the work with theatre.

This notion of theatre as going on in a kind of laboratory links very well with an assumption of theatre as pure fiction, opposed to reality. A consequence of my way of thinking is that theatre cannot be understood as fiction, opposed to reality; we need another language for the work done in organizational theatre, which I see as paradoxically fictitious and real at the same time. I will now turn to the anthro-

pologist Schieffelin who reflects on the relation between the illusory or fictitious and the real in performance.

4.5 Fiction and reality in theatrical performance

Schieffelin (1998) notes that western culture has a specific tradition of understanding performance such as theatre. In this Aristotelian tradition, we think of spectators as living in the real world, in contrast to the actors on stage, who create a virtual or imaginary 'reality'. In this context, acting means make-believe, illusion, lying. Although we acknowledge that performance has the power to affect us, still it remains no more than an illusion, a simulacrum.

Schieffelin questions this way of thinking; it is, in his words, 'a significant epistemological stumbling block' in understanding performance.¹² He sees performance as central to human activity; every act has an expressive dimension, and he says that 'The central issue of performativity ... is the imaginative creation of a human world' (ibid: 205).

Schieffelin says that performance cannot be understood solely as a result of conscious intent on the part of the performer: it can only be understood as a relationship. Whilst the burden of success is usually laid on the performers, the real location is in the relationship between the central performers and others. Thus Schieffelin sees performance as a contingent process, in which both the performers and the participants are constituted within the relationship between them: performance

¹² In anthropology, 'performance' has been a subject of interest for some time, for instance analyzing a text that is performed. In the early 1970s, Roman Jakobson founded a school of thought called *Performance Theory*, that also takes into account the 'receivers'. However, Jakobson builds on a clear communicative model:

The ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADRESSEE. To be operative the message requires a CONTEXT referred to; ... a CODE fully, or at least partially, common to addresser and addressee (or in other words, the encoder and the decoder of the message), and finally a CONTACT...

(Jakobson, 1960)

The title of Schieffelin's paper is 'Problematizing Performance', and thence it is a critique of this strand. In the performance theory tradition performance is seen as different from ritual, a split that Schieffelin rejects, because all communication involves some kind of performance.

is always interactive and fundamentally risky. This is close to the way I understand the relationship between our actors and the other participants we are working with.

Concerning theatre, he writes:

Where western assumptions align their relation between performer and spectator with relations like signifier/signified, text/reader, illusion/reality, deceit/authenticity, activity/passivity, manipulative/straightforward, they conceal important moral and epistemological judgements that undermine anthropological discussions which make use of western performance ideas in an unexamined way. It is for this reason that it is important to make the relationship between the participants and others in the performative events a central subject of ethnographic investigation.

(Ibid: 204)

He suggests that the dichotomies that we usually take for granted – for example, that what goes on at stage is illusion, as opposed to reality – are misleading. This challenges us to find other ways of understanding the opposites: rather than seeing simple dichotomies, we have to recognise theatre as, paradoxically, both illusionary and real.

4.5.1.1 My reflection

Schieffelin's argument is very close to my understanding of the communicative act, and I see clear links to the way I have narrated my understanding of what happened in the prologue. The response people give to the apparently illusory theatre is real, and through this response they co-create the fiction as real, whilst at the same time paradoxically it is fictitious. Reading Schieffelin reminds me that with theatre we are communicating in a special way, by performing¹³. He is very clear about how the traditional western way of understanding theatre is misleading, because it splits fiction and reality in an unfruitful way. Schieffelin notices that there is always a risk in performing because of the unpredictable nature of what emerges. For Schieffelin as an anthropologist, there is only one valid approach: to work towards understanding the nature of the particular relationship in

¹³ In the Dacapo Theatre we usually avoid calling our work 'performance' because of its high degree of interactivity; but Schieffelin's reflections about fiction and reality create a way of thinking of 'performance' that is powerfully relevant.

the performance he is working with. Schieffelin sees performance as a powerful, expressive dimension of strategic articulation, which does not mean that what comes across is purely conscious intention, because of the element of interactivity. The power in this is co-constructed, and not a simulacrum. This makes me think of theatre as a strong gesture, that our work is a powerful way of communicating, if the process of creating theatrical work is accepted by the participants and audience alike, as in the situation with Rosa. In the acceptance that can be seen by the engagement of the participants it becomes real, because their response is real, live in the situation. This encourages me to explore theatre more fully: how I can understand the particular form it takes, the power relations between participants in creating and working with fiction, and the risk taken by actors in performing in these situations.

4.6 Power relations among actors and consultant

I have mentioned earlier in this project that we are changing our work: meeting the same clients more and working more with management. Our working methods are also changing, and consequently so is the way we relate to each other in the Dacapo Theatre. The power relations amongst us both enable and constrain the work we are doing with clients, and at the same time it is creating and recreating our identity as consultant and actors, however I think that we are creating situations where it becomes increasingly difficult for actors to continuously recreate an identity as actors. Starting with a narrative, I will explore how I see the particularisation of this as our work is changing. In trying to understand what might be considered important for actors I will seek to understand how current theatre discourse explains the creation of situations and characters on stage. Here I will turn to Stanislavskij ([1940] 1998).

Recently we were working for Frendas Con D, also mentioned in Project Three, and I will explore what happened between the actors and me.

4.6.1 Working at Frendas Con D

I am with the three actors with whom I have been working intensively over the last year. We created this team a year ago, with the intention of exploring what the challenge from complexity might mean for our work. We are sitting in a car just after finishing work and, as we often do, we start talking about the work we have just done. A conflict arises among us about what happened.

We talk about a situation we had played on stage. It was a situation told by the participants about a group that did not want to work weekends. An actor was playing a powerful worker from that group, and three different people took turns talking with her in the role of supervisor. First an actor, who challenged her, saying the group had to take some weekends. She argued that the group needed to know in advance. The next supervisor, one of the participants, agreed about the need to be told in advance, and proposed a scheme where all the workers in the group could sign up for whichever weekends they could work. Gradually the relation developed, and the actor playing the strong worker promised to talk with the rest of the group.

‘How was this conversation?’ I ask the audience. ‘Very good’, one says, ‘they agreed about the scheme’. ‘No’ – another says, ‘this will never work, she did not promise anything, nothing will happen when she returns to the group.’

With a Meadian understanding of communication in mind, I said that how they think about this meeting inevitably takes account of anticipation of a meeting that has not yet been held. I pointed to the way we tend to take account, in our judgement of the present situation, of what we think will take place in the future. I continued by saying that when we later know about the subsequent meeting, this will in the same way inform their judgement of the current meeting. So, I concluded, anticipation of the future is informing the present, and what happens in the present is changing the past. I see many people nodding, and in the break afterwards, the two consultants are happy. ‘This is good... but very different’, one of them said.

Usually when we are working with theatre I do not express so explicitly my way of understanding communication.

The actors improvised the powerful worker talking with her group, and here too the participants' interpretations diverged afterwards. It was a very lively discussion, and people seemed to accept not agreeing. One argued that this was really bad, and he wanted to go back and have a talk with each of the people before this conversation. People very often want to go back in time when they disagree. I often argue against this, because I hear an implicit assumption that if we just had done it right the first time, things would have turned out better. I argued with him, and asked him whether he could do this now, after the group had had their meeting. He accepted that, although this was not what he wanted. He started with a worker who had been overruled. He tried hard to make him say that he did not want to work on weekends, but without success, apparently because he did not want to betray the group decision to the supervisor.

Talking in the car Lena referred to this situation where the man was invited on stage: 'Why don't you want to go back, as we used to do in forum theatre? You forced the man into something that was not what he wanted to do, and afterwards it was seen by everybody as a disaster.' 'Why didn't we just play it, so that people could see it for themselves?' Jennie continued, 'Why didn't we just play three different meetings, so that people could see the differences themselves?'¹⁴

This led to a conversation about what we are doing. If we play three different meetings, I argued, then we give the impression that the other meetings have not happened, and people would not recognise how what we have just played informs us. It could also easily create the illusion of a fixed set of ways to go, which would assume a formative process, not the genuinely unknown that I see in the improvisation as the real work. I say that from my point of view we are working

¹⁴ It is not by coincidence that the theatre has its name – Dacapo means 'play it again'. In this context it refers to a forum theatre technique where the situation is played again until a spectator stops it. This method has been widely used in the Dacapo Theatre since its beginning.

on (re)creating people's curiosity of what actually happens right now, which is unpredictable although usually recognizable. Lena reacts to this; she finds it odd, and it takes away some of the playfulness that for her is an important part of our work. This echoes other discussions we have had, where she has opposed a direction in the work towards more talk, and less theatre.

Lena had not understood what I was trying to say about Mead, and she did not like the feeling of standing there not understanding what I was saying. 'And I was not alone – other people in the room didn't understand it either', she said. We have discussed themes like this several times, but this time I feel vulnerable. I come to think that the work with changing our praxis is my project, not theirs. The way the discussion is developing reminds me of earlier discussions, and I realise that we are back to a pattern where I as the consultant am seen to take all the decisions, and the actors wait for me to take them. I say this. Lena responds that even if we seem to repeat a pattern it is at a much higher level. She says that basically she is very happy with the work the work we are doing, but sometimes it becomes too much.

It is an important – and also anxiety-provoking – conversation, that none of us finds easy. It becomes obvious for me that this is about identity. I become vulnerable because we are talking about my identity as a consultant. I come to think that the last half year had been hard, with exhausting work, and the work had so far not been a goldmine. Is this really the way I want to go with our work?

4.6.1.1 Later reflections

Obviously this is also threatening their identity as actors. I come to think of Preben Friis statement in his first project of his MA thesis: 'I am an actor, not a consultant or manager' (Friis, 2004). It has been interesting to follow change in him: now he is managing the group and he is also temporarily head of the board. When I go through the details of the work we did at Frendas, there are obvious differences from our earlier work. I wonder what it is that feels fundamental for them in doing their work, and their understanding of themselves as actors, that is being threatened by our emerging ways of working.

Common to the actors' backgrounds are two main influences that I see as important for identifying oneself as an actor in the Dacapo Theatre: namely, the work of Konstantin Stanislavskij, perhaps the person who has meant most to western theatre as we know it today, and the work of Keith Johnstone, who is known as the father of improvisational theatre. How do they talk about what it takes to create characters and relations on stage?

4.6.2 Theatre discourses on being an actor

Theatre in Western culture is hugely influenced by the Russian writer Stanislavskij. In a series of books (1991, 1997, [1940] 1998) he has described the work and training of actors. He died in 1938, but it is a striking experience to read him, because I can recognise in what I read a lot of the daily conversations with the actors I am working with today.

4.6.2.1 Creating truth on stage

Stanislavskij founded a theatre in Moscow in 1898, and he worked with Chekhov's pieces, which have great emotional intensity. He realised that the art of acting had to be renewed. Stanislavskij talked about creating 'truth' on stage; by this he means that the spectators believe in what they see. The task was to make the spectator believe in the 'scenic truth', forgetting that it is a play and not actual reality (Stanislavskij, [1940] 1998: 244).

This can easily be seen to be in line with the western understanding of theatre that Schieffelin criticizes, which creates a split between what really exists in real life and what you believe in on stage. But Stanislavskij expresses himself more subtly, for instance by saying that you 'believe' in it as spectator. Believing is not simulacrum, and I read this as meaning that Stanislavskij acknowledges the involvement of the spectators, who want to believe in the scenic truth.

The kind of theatre Stanislavskij is working with is in many ways very different from the interactive, improvised work that we do. For Stanislavskij, the rehearsal ends in a set piece. The actors are supposed to find their roles and be able to play

them in a convincing way with each other, day after day, and the audience is expected to remain spectators. But I think that creating ‘scenic truth’ is also an essential part of our actor’s work, creating a fiction on stage that can be believed in by all participants; and I think that our actors find their identity as actors in their ability to create this.

4.6.2.2 *Creation of role*

Stanislavskij’s influence has primarily been on the training of actors, and how to rehearse and develop roles for preparing a performance. He invented what is known as the ‘method of physical action’, also called ‘the improvisational method’. In the early years, Stanislavskij wrote his most famous book, *Creating a Role* (Stanislavskij, [1940] 1998). Here he talks about creativity as belonging to the subconscious. The task is for the individual actor to make every effort to keep a mental pathway open to ‘the creating subconscious’, and it is possible to consciously grasp the subconscious, by using mental techniques that stimulate the actor’s subconscious mind (ibid: 458).

In his later work he focused more and more on the importance of physical activity, physical movement, and also the actors physically relating to each other. He continued to talk about the individual actor, but developed a practice that was different. In rehearsals, Stanislavskij again and again focused on presence and physical action. Seeing the role not as given, not as something already ‘there’, but as something that needs constant work in the situation, Stanislavskij focused on improvisation. Even in the rehearsed and finished play Stanislavskij would encourage the actor to appreciate disruption, because this provides an opportunity to bring freshness into what may have become a well-rehearsed role. ‘No technique can compete with nature in this art. This spontaneity is the most precious in our art, because it comes with the surprises that life is full of, but that no actor can calculate in advance and that no stage manager can think of’ (Stanislavskij, 1997: 415, my translation).

Relating is not explicitly mentioned; it might seem as though the work is done by a single actor alone. It seems to be almost magical that it is possible, and

Stanislavskij reinforces this impression by referring only to the actors' 'access to the subconscious' in understanding this creativity. However, in his praxis, Stanislavskij's method of physical action ensures that the work is carried out in a way that is almost entirely relational, for instance by creating the role in improvisations with other actors.

4.6.2.3 My reflections so far

The focus Stanislavskij has on physical action is also very important for the actors I know. It influences not only their work with the creation of fiction, but all suggestions and ways of working, so this way of thinking is clearly a part of their identity as actors. I think that the physical action is important and necessary for their work – what Stanislavskij acknowledges as the link between body and mind. I get the impression that by experience could see the importance of physical action, which for him always is actors working together, but he does not explicitly acknowledge the interrelating aspect of this.

4.6.2.4 Understanding the actors' risk-taking

Stanislavskij tells a story where Tortsov – the trainer in his books – has asked the actors to play with masks. By painting a mask and putting on a costume, a role might emerge. Kostja, an actor who narrates the book, is supposed to do this. Then on stage, meeting Tortsov, he has a panic attack because no ideas come to him. He smears out the greasepaint in his face, and standing there he realises that the role that he can play is 'the critic'. He grabs a top hat and goes on stage. Here he finds himself responding to Tortsov in a nasty and highly offensive way, as he would never have done out of role. He is very surprised and slightly ashamed, while at the same time really enjoying it. Tortsov appreciates his work and asks him how he felt in that role. Kostja liked it, and felt a kind of self-confidence. For Tortsov Kostja really existed within the nasty reviewer – to live this out convincingly you cannot use other people's emotions, Kostja had only his own (Stanislavskij, [1940] 1998: 39).

Stanislavskij's point is that the actor has only his own emotions to draw on when playing the role. But this does not in itself explain why Kostja dared to be rude,

without prior agreement: being rude towards your teacher in the 1920s in Moscow was not easy. Tortsov sums up that what makes the actor bold is the mask and the costume. By playing a stranger, whose words he does not feel responsible for, he dares. It is not the physical mask that is important. Characterisation hides the actor as an individual, and protected by this 'mask' he dares to lay open the most intimate corners of his soul (ibid: 41).

In Kostja's reply I recognise a kind of satisfaction that I also hear actors talking about when doing good work. It is obvious how this way of thinking has influenced their way of understanding acting, and consequently shaping their identities as actors. They also say that they draw on what they understand of their own emotions in their work, and the fiction is consequently of great importance, because it gives freedom to do the work of acting.

4.6.2.5 Keith Johnstone about what it takes to work

Keith Johnstone (see Project One) acknowledges the work of Stanislavskij, although improvisational theatre is very different. Johnstone refers to a situation in one of Stanislavskij's books where he asks an actor to go into a room. The actor objects, 'How do I know how to do this?' – apparently needing some direction. Stanislavskij responds, 'Don't you know how to go into a room in an inn?'

For Johnstone this is about status. He comments on this situation from Stanislavskij by saying, 'What I think he "knows" is that he will have to play a particular status' (Johnstone, 1981: 47). By status Johnstone means 'pecking order' that he says is always established among social animals, preventing them from killing each other for food. Status is a bodily reaction, and humans are very aware of the way status differences are enacted physically: for instance a calm head and a steady voice are typical of high-status behaviour, whereas for instance turning one's toes towards each other, touching one's face again and again, not keeping one's head calm, are low-status actions. Johnstone deliberately trains the actors to assume a certain status and to respond immediately to the status they meet, by being able to change one's own status. He travelled with his theatre

group 'The Theatre Machine' all over Europe solely doing improvisation. 'Without the status work my improvisation group could never have toured successfully, not without preparing the scenes first' (ibid:46).

Of huge importance is the ability to change status. This was what I saw Lena do in the situation in the prologue. When she realised that the man was scared and could not concentrate, Rosa changed her status from low to much higher, That might not have been realistic for a cleaner if it had not been for this situation. This change in status was of great importance for what happened in their relation, and Lena is very aware of this.

Concerning the actors' knowledge of what they are doing Johnstone writes:

I began this essay by saying that an improviser shouldn't be concerned with the content, because the content arrives automatically. This is true and also not true. The best improvisers do, at some level, know what their work is about. They may have trouble expressing it to you, but they do understand the implications of what they are doing; and so do the audience.

(Johnstone, 1981: 142)

What happens is for the trained actor unknown, yet paradoxically not completely unknown, because they will have similar experiences from earlier. Johnstone is pointing at the difficulty of being able to improvise with recent experience still in mind, without in the end repeating themselves or failing to react in a lively way in the situation.

4.6.3 Running risks working in the Dacapo Theatre

In the light of this, what can I find as important for the actor's ability to run risks in performing?

As I already have mentioned, what we are doing is...

- not theatre in the sense of Stanislavskij, because of the high degree of improvisation.
- not improvised theatre in the sense of Johnstone, because in his kind of improvised theatre the actors create what goes on stage much more among

themselves. In our work the audience constantly gives cues, and their spontaneous reactions are guiding the actors.

- not Forum Theatre in the sense of Boal either. However, what does apply from Boal is his notion of staying with realism on stage, in the sense that the audience accepts the co-constructed work not only because they are amused, but because they accept it as realistic. It is by staying with this that it becomes serious work, even if at the same time it is often very funny.

To do this our actors work hard to continuously be able to take the attitudes of participants from the client's organization in their acting. This makes the performance of improvisation very realistic, and therefore the sometimes unrealistic turn that 'theatre sport' can take is virtually absent from our theatre.

4.6.3.1 Taking the attitude of the participants is risky

The three actors have read a draft of this project. In a discussion they reacted immediately to my reflections about their work on stage as risk-taking. When they go on stage playing a character, they see what they are doing as their job, as a skill they have learnt, not as taking any particular risk. I was surprised, because as I have mentioned several times in this project, I feel it this way myself and also on their behalf. Perhaps because of their experience and training, what once felt risky being an actor, as Stanislavskij describes, is now done from such long experience that the sense of risk is reduced. Also they are all very trained in the status work that Johnstone talks about. The paradox of not knowing and knowing at the same time becomes, for the experienced actor, a situation that you can live with and even enjoy, because you know that usually it finds a way forward when we work together.

One actor brought up a situation where she was asked to play a Chinese businessman who was extremely rude. She was unable to adopt the attitude of this man, and knowing that she played him very badly felt risky. This resonates very well to Stanislavskij's reflection that as an actor you can only draw on your own emotions, from your own experience. As the discussion continued we gradually

came to some very interesting points, about the actors taking the attitude of the participants in their work. When the actors got some insight into the reality of the participants they became aware of internal tensions, disagreements, spoken or unarticulated conflicts etc., and this is where the work became challenging. To know as an actor, that the actual gesture you are offering is at the same time a response to a specific conflict you have experienced, increases the anxiety and the sense of risk-taking. One actor mentioned that when you know things like that, you cease to simply be in the role of an actor. By taking the attitude of participants, their conflicts and tensions, the actors move away from 'just' being actors, and take responsibility that usually is thought of as being responsibility of the consultants.

Certain power relations between the actors and myself come into play here, too. Usually the actors rely on me as the consultant to take the initiative for continuing the work. The more they become aware of the attitude of the other participants, the more they can influence the work; but only by taking the risk of expressing it. So in the movement of our work their work becomes less safe.

4.7 Conclusion

In contrast to other ways of understanding organizational theatre, I describe power as key. I see power as relational, and it is in the midst of power relations that we find our identity. Change is consequently a change in power relations, which inevitably is risky, because you risk your position, wherever it is in the relation, and thus your identity is at stake.

Similarly, I can account for the way that working with theatre contributes to change, precisely because of its ability to change power relations. Because we are working with fiction people are more willing to risk their status, either by involving themselves or by accepting what takes place on stage as true or convincing. Working with theatre is not a laboratory, the consultant is not holding any process, and the actors are not doing work that other participants see merely as simulacrum. Whilst I just have mentioned that theatre is creating fiction, this is a para-

dox: however fictitious, it is at the same time real, because participants are co-constructing what is going on and accepting it as true, and thus it is influencing the power relations among them. How this will turn out cannot be predicted in advance.

Theatre, then, can be powerful as a part of organizational change. I have been part of a team where we have increasingly developed our ways of working, and our relations to clients are changing. Actors obviously play an important part in this work, and their ability to co-create fiction that is seen by other participants as true or convincing is of the utmost importance. By looking at the theatre tradition they are a part of, I see key themes that seem important for their ability to run the risk of creating truth on stage. Amid this is the importance of creating fiction, because actors experience the emotions and reactions they find themselves in on stage as their own, so the fiction serves as a protection for them as well as for the other participants.

4.8 Re-reading Project Four

While Project Three was about improvising as a consultant using theatre, this project is primarily about understanding the work we are doing with theatre. In the work with the furniture company, I argue that change does not take place separately from the work, but happens while we are actually working. I have chosen to emphasise this because in mainstream approaches to understanding what happens in an organization by introducing theatre, the focus is solely on what happens afterwards. Others take this approach because of the way they understand individual identity as a core that cannot be touched directly by conversation, therefore change can only happen in the individual. It therefore requires a change in the individual's mental model or a transitional object to effect this shift within the individual, and so these are the explanations I meet. In these explanations the significance of power tends not to be acknowledged. This is not always the case: in the synopsis, I will critically evaluate other approaches, focusing on postmodernist approaches to understanding theatre in organizations, where power is seen as essential.

Since I started working with theatre I have been searching for ways to understand what happens when we work with it. Arguing that change happens as a part of the work raised the question for me of how I could understand fiction in this. Assimilating Schieffelin's arguments about the western approach to performance became an important step, because here I found a way of understanding fiction as real, when people who are watching it take part and react sincerely. Through their genuine reactions the fiction also becomes real, a part of their experience and organizational life, although paradoxically it remains a fiction. Entering this paradoxically fictitious/real situation seems to be less risky than addressing conflicts or problems that are directly in play in between people, therefore it becomes easier to work with themes that really matter for people when we engage in this.

However, this places certain demands on the people working with this approach – and here I am thinking of the actors. They need not only to constantly create an improvisation on stage, but to do so in relation with the other participants in the room; in this respect their job is different from the kind of improvisational theatre that has become well known as theatre sport. And the more they participate, and run risks by reacting on stage in ways that address what they have experienced with these people, the more risky it becomes.

Intrinsic to this is the issue of power relations. No doubt the reader can see how the link between spontaneity and power-influenced relations is in play throughout my argument. Reading all four projects, I realise that power relations and their link to spontaneity is key to my the way my thinking has developed. For this reason, a reflection on this will become central to my synopsis.

5 Synopsis

Here I will explore the movement of the four projects, focusing on theatre improvisation as processes of change. I have come to see spontaneity and power as key issues, and the synopsis will follow my development of this. However, in reflecting on the projects new thoughts emerged, and it also became clear for me that certain themes had to be covered more thoroughly. The structure is the following.

- I. I bring together arguments from the projects about organization and individuals as forming and being formed in local relations; here I look further at the way complexity is being understood in social science.
- II. Reflection about spontaneity and power as it emerges in the projects; here I refer to relevant discourses in the literature around the issue of power.
- III. Reflection on being a consultant, as developed in the projects.
- IV. Reflection on theatre improvisation as processes of change. I refer to post-modern thinking on theatre in organizations.
- V. A look at methodology.
- VI. Concluding consideration of research as contributing to knowledge.

5.1 Understanding organization and organizational change

Theatre improvisation emerges in the present, and the interaction among the involved actors creates a movement of the situation in itself, at the same time changing the roles that the actors are playing and the relationships among them. This happens by reacting to each other. The response to what you have just said gives meaning to and influences the way you find yourself speaking.

Writing Project One, I began to see theatre improvisation as an important move away from Boal's forum theatre. I did not at that time make fuller sense of understanding organisation as an improvisational ensemble as developed by Patricia Shaw (2002). However, daily experience of theatre improvisations has influenced

my way of thinking of organizations, and it has helped me to see time and temporality differently, which is a main theme in Project Two.

5.1.1 Temporality and change

At the time I wrote Project Two, I was highly focused on the ephemeral opportunities for change that occur in the present. I introduced the notion of ‘openings’; moments of attention to incomplete change and I became aware of such moments as the emergent and the unpredictable. Later I abandoned the term ‘openings’ because it tempts us to think of literally opening a door to glimpse something already existing, a way of thinking in which the temporal and paradoxical nature of this seems to become less obvious. By this I mean that change and stability co-exist as the same movement. I have found, and still find, difficulties in articulating temporal ways of understanding change. This became the focus for my Project Three, expressed as ‘meeting difference’.

5.1.2 Complex responsive processes

In this thesis I write about situations that would be referred to by some sociologists as taking place at the ‘micro’ level. I see such interactions as creating much broader patterns than we come to realise – such as what we call ‘organization’ and ‘society’. In conversation we cannot repeat ourselves, because even in trying to do so we cannot help introducing smaller or larger differences into contexts which will also have shifted. These changes might become significant and be recognised as novelty, or we might improvise within a familiar pattern, which we come to experience as stability. In these processes the emerging patterns are unpredictable, although often recognisable.

I have examined Stacey, Griffin and Shaw’s treatment of these processes as complex responsive processes of relating. They find analogies in natural science, and refer to Prigogine (1997); (Prigogine and Stengers, 1984), which I discuss in Project Three. In his work with gas particles he is interested in conditions far from equilibrium for instance that of adding heat to gas. The particles spontaneously organise and patterns emerge, spatiotemporal organizations that Prigogine calls dissipative structures. This happens through micro-interactions (‘resonance phe-

nomena') between the particles, which cannot be predicted or controlled from outside, and these activities are responsible for the overall patterning. For these particles, the micro-interactions between them are all that is required to explain the emergence of the overall patterning.

An analogy can be drawn to human interaction in which one can recognize self organization. However, although gas particles can self-organise, they are not able to create novelty. Humans can think and take action, and therefore Prigogine's work does not in itself argue consistently for the kind of radical changes in the overall pattern that we see in human history,

5.1.2.1 Modelling complexity in social science

Ray (1992) published the so-called Tierra simulation, a computer simulation where he showed that introducing random mutation among simple bit strings made it possible for the system to create novel attractors by the string's interaction. Difference among the entities creates in itself a diversity that can contribute to radical changes. Peter Allen has been using computer modelling as a way of understanding complexity in social science (Allen, 1998). He argues that in modelling we usually derive a reduced and simplified description and that we must be acutely aware of the assumptions we are making (ibid: 12).

In modelling the emphasis has usually been on finding equilibrium. If in simulations nonlinear dynamics are introduced, the simulated system can exhibit a rich spectrum of possible behaviours. Other assumptions are usually made in this kind of modelling: for instance, it is usually assumed that events at the micro-level occur at their average rate, which means that it is possible to operate with a kind of average density. This is not the case in social systems: events do not follow an average distribution, consequently events of varying probability can and do occur. This 'destroys the idea of a trajectory, and gives the system a collective adaptive capacity corresponding to the spontaneous spatial reorganization of the structure' (ibid: 10) and leads to what Allen calls 'self-organizing behaviour' which can be seen as a collective adaptive response to changing external conditions. This step is

similar to Prigogine's dissipative structures, and Allen concludes that it is not possible here to figure out any strategy that will guarantee success.

A third assumption usually made is that all individuals are identical, or have a diversity that follows a normal distribution around an average type. By allowing difference, as in the Tierra simulation, not only can self-organization take place, but also evolution; the system becomes capable of novelty. For Allen the power to adapt lies not in extreme efficiency, but in creativity and the will and ability of the individual to experiment and take risks. Strategies are interdependent, and value can only be assigned afterwards when a strategy succeeds .

5.1.2.2 Exploring complexity from within

I find that Ray and Allen convincingly argue that micro-interactions in themselves can generate radically different patterns on larger scales. Stacey et al. draw an analogy with human interaction, and their way of understanding this interaction links to Mead and Elias in talking about temporality and movement.

However experiments like Prigogine's and computer simulations are initiated from outside. In contrast to this in the live complex responsive processes everybody is a part of nobody is able to set up or design these from outside. The only choice we have is to contribute from the position in which one finds oneself. In choosing among conflicting desires, preferences, impulses, intentions and plans we enable and constrain each other, via a nonlinear patterning of interaction with others where even the smallest differences can be amplified. I will focus on power and spontaneity, as I have increasingly found these to be essential in understanding human interaction; later I will explore how working with theatre improvisation also involves working with the same themes.

5.1.3 Communication is not a tool

Human interaction is communication. This is usually understood as messages sent from one independent individual to another. In the projects I have noticed the prevalence of this thinking, and I refer, among others, to Schein. The sender communicates a message, which in itself has a clear meaning, formed in the mind

of the sender. If the receiver cannot understand it, it is because the sender is not communicating clearly enough or because the listener is not able to listen, maybe because of a filter block. This explains communication solely as a tool for conveying messages, separate from sense-making and action. Consequently, in the sender–receiver way of thinking, processes of sense-making and creation of novelty take place within the individual. As I mention in the various projects, I have found this view of communication to be a key argument in most organizational thinking.

I have myself thought of communication in these terms, not being satisfied with it because I sensed that more was going on. For example, I found it increasingly difficult within this framework to explain and understand the nature of theatre improvisation. Mead ([1932] 2002, 1934) offers another explanation, which is further developed in the thinking of complex responsive processes. In conversation gesturing cannot be separated from responding; it is one act. Meaning emerges in this act as gesturing / responding, which again calls forth other responses that become gestures. This might seem to be a minor shift, but I have gradually come to realise the radical difference Mead is making.

In Project Three I mention how, in my relationship with an internal consultant, I was involved in a conversation that completely changed my understanding of an e-mail she had sent me months before. In the sender–receiver model, this would mean that a filter either in her sending or in my receiving had prevented me from understanding it correctly, implying that in the mind of the sender there was one unchangeable meaning. One could argue that filters prevent us from seeing this meaning, but this implies that a concrete meaning already exists when the message is sent. Here Mead's thinking differs; meaning is not discovered - it emerges in conversation. As I began to play with this way of understanding communication, I could see this happening all the time. Situations of being asked what I 'really meant' came to mind. I have gradually come to see that what was being referred to as misunderstandings that needed to be clarified can be seen as moments of the creative / destructive emergence of meaning.

5.1.3.1 Understanding time differently

Writing Project Two, I became aware that this notion of co-creation of meaning implies a certain way of thinking, in which time is not linear. Our perceptions of the past and the future continue to influence actual conversation, just as the present conversation influences our perception of the past and our intentions for the future. Mead developed this with intense precision:

Given an emergent event, its relations to antecedent processes become conditions or causes. Such a situation is a present. It marks out and in a sense selects what has made its peculiarity possible. It creates with its uniqueness a past and a future. As soon as we view it, it becomes a history and a prophecy. Its own temporal diameter varies with the extent of the event.

(Mead, [1932] 2002: 52)

This paradoxical understanding of the present is at the core of my own thinking of the movement of thought and spontaneity, which I shall now explore.

5.2 Spontaneity

I came to see meaning as conversation, and new meaning as co-created in conversational interaction. I have also come to understand the emergence of mind including what we refer to as individual mind and identity as the same processes. As I began to realize the consequences of this thinking, the theme of Project Three became ‘meeting difference’.

5.2.1 Self and spontaneity

In gesturing and responding, we are constantly creating images of what other people are thinking. Mead talks about this as ‘taking the attitude of the other’. At the same time we find ourselves responding in ways that we cannot predict, because the response, and the response to the response, take place as the present, and will therefore inevitably involve spontaneous action – some kind of action that is not predictable, even to oneself, although, in varying degrees, recognisable. As we are responding to others we are also responding to ourselves, namely the attitude we have taken of the other. Mead calls this internal conversation the ‘I – Me dialectic’.

tic'¹⁵. Self is for Mead this continuously ongoing conversation: taking place internally as the 'I – Me dialectic', and externally as gesturing / responding – in effect the same process going on at the same time.

In conversation intention/gesture includes enacting the interplay of past experience, and at the same time this intention changes as one relates to the other and to the attitude of the other and the attitudes of others as the understanding of self – the 'me' - as one experiences it. This happens spontaneously as one finds oneself saying and doing something that is not planned.

So relating spontaneously goes on in an interaction where one takes the attitude of the other, and this in turn shapes and transforms the 'me' – i.e. one's view of oneself. This is intimately linked to what we could call role, which I have explored in Project Three, where I also have critiqued other ways of understanding role.¹⁶

5.2.2 Other ways of understanding spontaneity

In trying to understand improvisation and spontaneity I have come across other approaches to spontaneity. In Project Three I mention Weick (2001, 2001), who finds improvisation important for the creation of novelty in organizations. Weick tones down spontaneity in favour of intuition, a term that he continues to focus on without clearly defining what it is. I argue that this is linked with the way he understands the creation of mind as going on within an individual core identity.

Crossan and Sorrenti define improvisation as *intuition guiding action in a spontaneous way* (Crossan and Sorrenti, 2002). They also work with an individual core of mind and self. However, they do not come much closer to understanding spontaneity, apart from acknowledging that it goes on in the present. Improvisation and spontaneity become a capacity or inherent quality in the individual, not a rela-

¹⁵ 'I' represents the spontaneous response to 'me' that represents the attitude of the other. However, it does not make sense to talk solely of one of these elements without the other, as they are constantly responding to each other. By using the term 'dialectic' Mead is insisting on and calling attention to the paradoxical nature of this process.

¹⁶ Re-reading my Project Three I can see that in this project I am not consistently making this last step clear – that in taking an attitude to the other, one is also taking an attitude to oneself.

tional activity. For Schein (1999) improvisational skills refer to learning how to create the right scenes and manage the dramatic process towards a desirable outcome, and he defines improvisation as ‘rewriting the script’ – a purely individual activity, where intention is clearly established before acting (see section 3.3.2).

5.2.3 Spontaneity is an interdependent activity

With reference to Johnstone and Mead, I see spontaneity as an activity of relating without being in control of the situation, meaning that one acts before being able to tell why. I will relate two different experiences that each in their way cast light on spontaneity and how it has developed for me:

- In Project Four I mention that I find myself intervening in the actors’ play before knowing why I do so. I found that my intervention became sterile, and stifled the flow interaction if I waited until I had formulated my reason for interrupting to myself. By this I am not saying I am now reacting from pure impulse; the spontaneous reaction is influenced by what I remember, but I react before I am able to consciously account for this.
- In Project Two I talk about working with another learning set who found themselves repeating a stuck pattern of communication. In this work I became aware that I was reacting spontaneously to the tiniest bodily gestures of other participants. One cannot hold back a certain bodily reaction (such as a smile or a frown); another responds and this in turn calls forth further response. A kind of bodily resonance is going on, and I notice that this iteration happens at such lightning speed that one reacts independently of being able to express the response in words. This is in line with Stacey’s views on the sharing of knowledge when, referring to Stern (1985) and Damasio (2000), he concludes: ‘Instead of thinking about sharing something going on in the brain, one might think of bodies resonating with each other, yielding emphatic understanding’ (Stacey, 2003b: 118).

I have come to see spontaneity as making sense together, paradoxically by staying with the situation by acting surprisingly into it, searching for mutual recognition. Spontaneity is manifested between people not only as activities involving talk and

language, but also as bodily reactions that are equally part of conversation. In Project Three I reflect upon Gergen's notion of 'rhythms of conversation', and mention that I think he has hit upon something important when he focuses on bodily interactions. Very recently I have become aware of new brain research that sheds new light on the physical aspects of communication. We have certain neurons, called mirror neurons (Gallese et al., 1996) that recognise and associate intention with certain patterns of action, especially hand and mouth movements. These neurons recognise movements done by other humans at the same speed as movements done by oneself (Wohlschlagel et al., 2003), and much more quickly than thought, indicating that on the neural level humans are reacting essentially socially (Ferrari et al., 2003). McNeill (2004) links this research with Mead's understanding of humans as essentially social¹⁷:

One's own gestures can activate the part of the brain that responds to intentional actions, including gestures, by someone else, *and thus treats one's own gesture as a social stimulus.*

(McNeill, 2004: 14)

This explains spontaneity as social activity; where in the emergence of patterning one surprises oneself as well as the other. I understand the 'I' as social here because the unpredicted response to 'me' can be seen as generated in the process of mirror neuron activity.

We are reacting without knowing exactly why we react and of course also without knowing exactly what we will be doing as we find ourselves doing it. However, I argue that this does not take place separately from reasoning, but as a part of it, as what it means to make sense together.

5.2.4 Invitation to spontaneity

In our work with theatre we are deliberately trying to encourage mutual spontaneity. Re-reading the projects, I therefore come to see our activity with theatre as an *invitation to spontaneity*. Just as we can attempt to control the conversation by

¹⁷ McNeill also notes that Mead uses a word for physical activity, namely 'gesture'.

making an effort to control the act of responding, I think that we can set a theme that serves as invitation to let go of control.

I think that this notion of invitation to spontaneity is ubiquitous among humans. We find ourselves invited to spontaneity when we are in the middle of a gesture–response interaction that *disturbs our assumed view of the other* – the image/illusion of the people we know. One can recognise invitation to spontaneity as interaction where one has only fuzzy expectations in the patterning of conversation. This happened for me in the situation mentioned in the prologue to project three with Susan, the consultant who responded differently than I had anticipated in the situation. In recognizing the other and oneself we necessarily have to act spontaneously to avoid trying to control the conversation. In contrast to spontaneity itself, inviting to spontaneity is not per se a spontaneous action. When actors play a rehearsed piece it is a deliberate, chosen action inviting the involvement of the audience. I see such an invitation as essentially risky because it challenges what you expect the other to expect, and this is essential to the power aspect of relating.

5.3 Power

I have argued that spontaneity and invitation to spontaneity basically is *risky*. I have come to see this as linked to power. I have worked with power in the tradition of critical theory, where power is seen to be held by certain structures. Novelty emerges because resistance arises to this. Emerging industrialisation, for example, was met with demands from working people who organised themselves into unions and political parties. From the resultant conflicts emerged the society I have come to know today in Denmark, for instance, with social security, free education, etc.

In Projects One and Two I became interested in understanding power not as a structural attribute, but as a relational activity among people in which they are influencing each other. Mead is not talking about power, but about *social control*.

5.3.1 The notion of social control

By taking the attitude of the other social control emerges, according to Mead:

The human societies in which we are interested are societies of selves. The human individual is a self only in so far as he takes the attitude of another toward himself. In so far as this attitude is that of a number of others, and in so far as he can assume the organized attitudes of a number that are co-operating in a common activity, he takes the attitudes of the group toward himself, and in taking this or these attitudes he is defining the object of the group, that which defines and controls the response. Social control, then, will depend upon the degree to which the individual does assume the attitudes of those in the group who are involved with him in his social activities.

(Mead, [1932] 2002: 195-6)

When I look at the various situations I have worked with up to this point in this thesis, this do not fully explain the constraints I experience among people that I see as power.

In Project One I mention a situation where the actors play a story told by participants from the shop floor of a factory. Fritz had taken a place that, according to the agreed rotation system, was Carla's. He refused to move from his workplace, because the day before he was moved from the workplace where he should be according to the plan, and now he did not want to be pushed around. On stage Carla was a close colleague of Lisa. We played out a possible gossiping conversation between the two of them:

I asked the audience – what would be the next thing Carla and Lisa would do?

Chatter about how stupid he was, they said. And next? I asked. Tell somebody else about him, they said. We played that on stage. Somebody would tease him in the canteen, they said. We saw that. What is happening? I asked. No reaction. So what can he do, I asked. He can piss off, somebody said. Nobody tried to protect him.

(section 1.1.2.1)

Fritz broke the rules for acceptable behaviour, and becomes excluded, an outsider. Nobody in the audience is allowed, or allows themselves, to articulate his perspec-

tive. This is very hard to interpret solely from Mead's understanding of social control as taking the attitude of the other. Why can it be so difficult for people in that situation to take Fritz's attitude? How can we understand the nature of this? Were they unable to see his perspective, or were they just afraid of speaking it aloud? I find that Mead's way of arguing does not fully explain anxiety or why the processes of human relating are often felt as risky.

In the projects I have argued that Elias has an important contribution to understanding the nature of power as a relational activity, but I want to further explore his arguments here. Also I have only superficially looked at other ways of thinking about power in the projects, so before I continue to reflect on power and spontaneity I will again take up Elias's arguments in the context of current discourses on power.

5.3.2 Power as dependency

In his writing Elias has explored the emergence of civilization as we know it, and for him power is essential in understanding this. Power is about dependency:

We depend on others; others depend on us. In so far as we are more dependent on others than they are on us, more reliant on others than they are on us, they have power over us, whether we have become dependent on them by their use of naked force or by our need to be loved, our need for money, healing, status, a career, or simply for excitement.

(Elias, 1998: 132)

Elias understands this dependency as essential for human activity; consequently power is a human condition, and for Elias it makes no sense to talk about any human relationship without taking power into account.

Elias disagrees with any idea of the individual as a self-contained unit, calling this concept *homo clausus*, and uses also the image of 'thinking statues' (Elias, 1991). Elias is talking about 'we' identities, by which he means that people sharing the

same view of other people become a group. Individuals who do not share the same meaning run the risk of being excluded from the group.¹⁸

Elias says that groups define themselves in the process of including and excluding others. People find themselves belonging or not belonging. Together with Scotson, Elias (1994) studied the relations between a group that moved to a new housing estate in Winston Parva, a community with an older estate. Conflicts, hostility and gossip proliferated. Elias notes that gossiping is extremely important for the group's ability to create and sustain its identity:

It is symptomatic of the high degree of control that a cohesive group is able to exercise upon its members that not once during the investigation did we hear of a case in which a member of the 'old' group broke the taboo of the group against non-occupational personal contact with members of the 'new' group.

(Elias & Scotson, 1994:
xxxix)

Elias focuses on the kind of self-control that is exercised in groups, and shifts are anxiety-provoking. In the light of this it is not difficult to understand the audience's reaction to the story about Fritz referred to in the last section. People did not want to challenge the prevailing opinion because they feared exclusion, an anxiety that does not necessarily have to be explicit for the people involved to work. Perhaps they were not even able to see the situation from Fritz's perspective. In their study of Winston Parva, Elias and Scotson mention:

As a matter of course, members of an outsider group are regarded as failing to observe these norms and restraints. That is the prevailing image of such a group among members of the established group. Outsiders are ... experienced as anomic.

(Ibid: xxiv)

Maybe people were unable to hear Fritz's argument about the unfairness he had experienced the day before, as he could be considered anomic. I cannot know; but, judging from the way people reacted, I sensed that this was the case for many of

¹⁸ Elias is close to Mead's understanding of human identity. He says that 'a person's we-image and we-ideal form as much part of that person's self-image and self-ideal as the image and ideal of him- or herself as the unique person to which he or she refers as 'I' '(Elias and Scotson: xliii); this resonates with Mead's understanding of the individual as essentially social.

the participants, as Elias observes about the established group from Winston Parva.

It is not only in what we would perceive as the powerful groups that this 'we' identity is played out. I read recently an interview with a black man who noticed the repression of people he had lived together with in his childhood. Reading books and listening to specific types of music was 'whitish behaviour', and being black you simply did not do things like that when living in that particular community, as the repression was felt very strongly. It is not difficult in this light to see how ideology is produced by gossip and other ways of creating a 'we' identity. Stacey is referring to Elias when he says:

Ideology is thus a form of communication that preserves the current order by making that current order seem natural. In this way, ideological themes organize the communicative interactions of individuals and groups. As a form of communication, as an aspect of the power relations in the group, ideology is taken up in that private role-play, that silent conversation, which is mind in individuals.

(Stacey, 2003b: 125)

This gives a clear framework for understanding the relational nature of power and creation of identity, groups and ideology. However, while Elias is fully aware that the emergence of these patterns is unpredictable, he does not focus on how this happens in the ongoing relationship, in the micro-interactions, as he does not recognise the importance of spontaneity in the sense that Mead does.

Also Joas (2000) finds a need to focus on power and exclusion in understanding identity. However, he establishes a split between dialogical processes based on Mead, which he finds forms identity, and power processes – including violence and exclusion – which he finds stabilise identity. In a paper about values and norms in organizations, Stacey argues against this dualism (Stacey, 2004a), since both the genesis and stabilisation of values arise at the same time and by way of the same processes of communicative interaction and power relating. Stacey points out that there are no universals outside human interaction, which is not the same as 'anything goes', because any generalisations and idealisations are constantly particularised in a specific interactive situation involving negotiation of

conflict and power relating. This is in line with my attempt in this thesis to find a way of understanding how spontaneity and power are intertwined in these processes.

I will now briefly examine other ways of looking at power in organizations as a way of putting Elias' work into perspective.

5.3.3 Mainstream understanding of power

Dahl defines power: 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would otherwise not do' (Dahl, 1957: 202-3). Mintzberg (1983: 4) defines power as 'the capacity to effect (or affect) organizational outcomes'. Kanter (1977) refers to classical physics in her definition of power as potential energy. Kearins (1996) notes that such views are founded on the assumption that power is a commodity that can be possessed. She comments that the majority of authors of books on organizations convey the idea of power as something that can be harnessed and used for the good of the organization. Kearins points at a distinction usually made between 'power over', which she mentions has negative connotations for some authors, in contrast to 'power to'¹⁹.

Mintzberg (1983) mentions that the word 'power' lacks a convenient verb form, forcing us to talk about 'influencing' and 'controlling' instead. However, in his book there is no focus on power as a temporal activity, as it is restricted to an exploration of structures that can be recognised as holding potential power. Pettigrew conceptualises the dynamics of an organization as individuals or groups that make claims upon the resource-sharing system of the organization, which is regulated by power (Pettigrew, 1977). He conducted detailed examinations of power in organizations, for instance in 1972 exploring the control of information in a company's decision process; and in 1998 exploring power in 50 boardrooms (Pettigrew, 1973, Pettigrew, 1979, Pettigrew and McNulty, 1998). In the latter, Pettigrew – with McNulty – argues that it is time to augment the structural meth-

¹⁹ Wartenberg (1990) also mentions this distinction: by power he means the ability an individual may possess and use, while 'power over' in his terms refers to hierarchical relationships. Both terms refer to power as something to possess, and differ from a relational view of power.

ods of the agency and managerial hegemony theorists by an approach to power dynamics that is jointly contextual and processual (ibid: 201). However, the term 'processual' here acquires a specific meaning, since power is basically still seen as a commodity linked to the structure. The contextual and processual part is thus treated in terms of the individual 'will and skill' to exercise it.

Pfeffer (1981, 1992b, 1992a) sees organizations as political battlefields, and considers the interests between opposing power structures to be what develops organizations. Pfeffer also understands power as a potential force (1992b: 14). For him, power is a tool for getting things done²⁰, deliberately chosen by the individual to enforce intentions already there. However, Pfeffer partly accepts uncertainty by saying that 'the consequences of our decisions are often known only long after the fact, and even then with some ambiguity' (Pfeffer, 1992a: 37). But he finds that we as individuals have to run that risk, because without power nothing could be done.

5.3.3.1 Comparing with power as dependency

None of the above-mentioned approaches meet Elias' notion of power as dependency. Instead they tend to understand power as what Elias would call an amulet, something to hold: the potential power is 'there'. Pettigrew seeks to understand why this apparent potential power has different outcomes, which he basically understands as differences in the will and skill of the individual. This is a different way of understanding power, which also links to differences in understanding process. Elias, like Mead, is inspired by Hegel's phenomenology (Hegel, [1807] 1977), the dialectical movement of thought, which I will return to in the chapter about methodology.

5.3.3.2 Foucault, power as productive of identities and the social

In contrast to power seen as potential, Kearins mentions Foucault (1984), for whom power can be understood only when exercised in action (Kearins, 1996).

²⁰ Pfeffer also refers to hierarchy and building shared visions in the same way, as tools for getting things done.

Westwood (2002) complements this with another influential view of power, in which:

...power is not a frozen attribute contested by two known quantities. Instead, it is the very contestation that generates, shifts and sustains the identities of protagonists. In this sense, power is productive of identities and of the social.

(Westwood, 2002: 26)

Westwood refers to Foucault on this. By describing a variety of themes – institutions like prisons and psychiatry, but also human attributes such as sexuality and knowledge – Foucault is exploring how power is exercised:

Now the study of this microphysics presupposes that the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but power exercised as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to 'appropriation,' but to dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege one might possess, that one should take as its model a perpetual battle, rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory.

(Foucault and Rabinow, 1984: 174)

I see Foucault's contribution in the way that he has brought attention back to the importance of power in forming identity and society, and reading him shows that this formation is key to relating to each other. However, he is not looking for ways to understand power, he merely describes it; and as a postmodernist he keeps distancing himself from his own explanations.

Foucault claims that we must cease to describe power in negative terms. He says that there are 'only reciprocal relations. However he writes in a way that gives rise to other associations Power is exerted upon the individual: 'the individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an 'ideological' representation of society; he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called discipline' (Foucault and Rabinow, 1984: 247). As I see it, Foucault is working with power as exerted upon the individual by a kind of anonymous force, and I do not find this helpful in understanding power as dependency among people. I will return to postmodernist thinking later.

5.3.4 Linking power and spontaneity

Reading Elias I have come to understand power as dependency that constrains the relation; paradoxically, the same constraint also enables the relation. Earlier I would have found it important to work for a kind of alignment in the power relation, so that the weaker part could be more in balance with the stronger. I would have seen this as important for encouraging participation and development. Working with Project Two has basically changed this way of thinking for me, and I have come to see changing power relations as inherently linked to the emergence of spontaneity. To accept that power relations can be open to change is risky. Based on the work of Elias, the nature of this risk has been identified as the risk of exclusion and anxiety concerning the loss or fragmentation of identity.

To act spontaneously is both conscious and unconscious, in the sense that one is not at that moment fully aware of, or in control of, one's action. Spontaneity is not to be chosen freely by the individual, it is relational activity involving bodily gestures that our brain is able to 'read' – and to which we attribute intention – with lightning speed (Ferrari et al., 2003, Gallese et al., 1996, Wohlschlager et al., 2003). The creation of a 'we' identity as described by Elias, by processes of including and excluding, by gossiping and by creating ideology, is the basis for understanding the creation of power relations and understanding the nature of the risk that is linked to spontaneity and invitations to spontaneity.

5.3.5 Power and spontaneity – a paradox

This is my key argument in this thesis: As power relations are about dependency, they are a fundamental aspect of all human relations, which paradoxically constrain and enable the relationship at the same time; and in this dependency we recognise the other as well as ourselves. However, this dependency is not static or just 'there' – together we create and recreate it as we are moving continuously, both in patterns we can recognise and at the same time in new patterning that is unfamiliar to us. As we take steps together, the involved spontaneity challenges the power relations, and this is why spontaneity and invitations to spontaneity are felt to be risky. One can recognise spontaneity as a sense of liveliness in relating

in the present as one becomes challenged and confused in taking the attitude of the other. Moving together is thus a process of spontaneity in which we are recognising or not recognising each other. This is the creation of dependency, that is power relation. So, paradoxically, spontaneity and invitation to spontaneity are creating and challenging relating as power at the same time as relating as power is making it risky to act spontaneously.

In the prologue of Project Three I mention a meeting with Susan, the internal consultant. I recognised a change in her way of behaving; we were waiting for a meeting with people from the production, and contrary to my expectations she had not prepared a plan to present to them. I felt extremely alive, and in the terms I have just used I now understand what happened as an invitation to spontaneity. I think that the risk she was running could be seen as incompetent for an internal consultant, in the eyes of the others as well as in her own eyes. I think that she did this for a mix of different reasons: she had gained confidence in us, but I also anticipated that until this meeting she had felt herself in a weaker power position in relation to the production manager, and this became an opportunity. Paradoxically, as we entered into spontaneous activity where she surprised me, she became very present for me.

In Project Four I mention the younger brother who ends up on stage with an actor playing a cleaner, with the task of explaining to her why her job was going to be outsourced (section 4.1). As a member of the audience he had insisted that she was entitled to a decent explanation. He had expected this to settle the situation, and I could sense from the bodily reaction of the other participants that they also had expected this to be the last word on the matter. So he was surprised when I invited him on stage to give her an explanation, and he definitely did not want to go. But had he rejected my invitation, he would have lost power in the eyes of his brothers, the rest of the participants and in his own eyes; so he had to accept the invitation, which then turned into a highly improvised situation, again shifting power relations.

My interpretation of both situations changed as a part of the spontaneous activity. I developed a completely different understanding of an important e-mail I had received from Susan months before the meeting with her; and when the younger brother went on stage, this changed my view of the middle brother, the one who had invited us to work with the company, since I came to understand the risk he had been running by inviting us. I also gained insight into the way the brothers related to each other and to their employees. I note that this insight came to me in the midst of spontaneous action.

Bringing out these experiences, it might look as though they only have positive outcomes. This is not the case: the relationship with Peter in Project One is one example of a negative outcome, and for other participants the outcome can only be judged in hindsight. This leads me to review the way my arguments have emerged about being a consultant working with theatre, since that is what I have done and written about in the projects.

5.4 Being a consultant

By responding to what others are saying, by linking themes, the practitioner is helping to articulate emerging themes and in so doing influencing the further patterning of the conversation. It is these shifts in communicative patterning that constitute organizational change.

(Stacey, 2003a: 403)

As a consultant I participate directly with the people I meet. I become part of power relations that both constrain and enable my work, but I feel responsible for inviting to spontaneity by taking certain risks myself, because I believe it is through such activity that the consultant can help to co-create shifts in the communicative patterning that Stacey describes.

Because an external consultant is not part of the organization's daily life, it is seductively easy for us and our clients to conclude that the consultant is somehow 'outside the system'. In Project Three I explore Schein's theories on process consultancy. Here 'process' has a specific meaning, whereby the 'process consultant' leads the process. Inevitably this means a doubling of process, because at the

same time as he tries to take responsibility for what he thinks is process, there will be another process that he is a part of and cannot escape or stand outside of. However, as Stacey points out²¹, the focus shifts when one takes a perspective where we are seen to act because of the system (2003a: 272). For him it is a consequence of this thinking that *participation* comes to mean to participate as part of a system, and *meaning* is to produce that system. Consequently interaction is seen to create something that is abstracted from the direct experience of interaction.

In my reflections in Project Three in reference to Schein's approach to consultancy, I mention that according to him the consultant holds the ultimate power. Obviously I disagree with this.

5.4.1 Reflecting on how my practice as a consultant is changing

A month ago I met with another manager at a production site closely linked to the site that Peter, the manager from the story in Project One, was managing. Two and a half years have passed, and sitting in her office I mentioned my experience with Peter. I told her my version of what happened, and that Peter apparently was not very satisfied. I also told her that since we were working with change we could not make guarantees about the outcome, not even that they would be satisfied with it. This became a very lively conversation in which she to some extent realised that she could easily underestimate the hopes and expectations that her behaviour awakens among the employees.

Compared with what I did in the work with Peter, I can see that I have developed my skill of creating a working relationship with managers. I enter such relations with more confidence. My awareness of, and ability to contribute to, spontaneity and invitations has changed – perhaps because it has become easier for me to take their attitude, but also because I have come to think of process in the sense I have outlined here. I find increasing resonance when addressing the task of 'working live' and the necessity of being present, given the unpredictability of the out-

²¹ See also Project Two where I have explored systems thinking in the line of Bateson.

come. In this process I think that working with 'meeting difference', the theme of Project Three, has been important.

As mentioned in Project Four, during recent years there has been a change in the work we do, working more with managers and in general working over a longer span of time. It also seems as though our company is going to face more competition, as an increasing number of actors want to take part in some form of organizational theatre. In light of this, I see the development described here taking on greater importance.

5.5 Working with improvisational theatre

In working with theatre improvisation, I see a unique ability in consultancy to participate in a way that creates possibilities for spontaneous action and thereby contributes to change in conversation. In the language I have developed writing this synopsis; work with theatre improvisation can be seen as an invitation to spontaneity among the participants.

In Project Four I refer to several studies that work with understanding the impact of organizational theatre. I conclude that most of the studies do not acknowledge change as taking place as a direct part of working with theatre, but rather see change as something that happens afterwards, mostly as change in individual mental models. In contrast to this I argue that in creating fiction, change can happen as we work with theatre improvisation. Even if we are working with fiction, the responses people bring into it are real, based on their own experience, and they come to see each other differently as they participate in the play. Therefore, situations occur that people cannot and do not reject as pure fiction, and power relations and the themes of communication among people change while we are engaged in the work together with them. In this I draw on Schieffelin (1998). He argues from an anthropological background that performance cannot be seen as fiction opposed to reality, and he rejects the way we usually understand theatre as illusion or simulacrum. Performance can only be seen as relational, a contingent process where both performers and other participants are constituted within this

relationship. Thus he argues that performance is always interactive and fundamentally risky.

Schieffelin's argument is even stronger in our case, because we are working with theatre improvisation and at the same time drawing heavily on people's responses, so that fiction and reality become a paradox. I think that working with theatre attracts focus to the continuously ongoing improvisations of daily life. In situations where people would usually see no way to respond except in ways that restore familiarity and recognisable patterns, improvisational theatre invites to awareness of the opportunity for taking risks. Perhaps working with theatre creates sensitivity towards this because risk is perceived differently in what is seen as fiction.

5.5.1 Power and spontaneity in working with improvisational theatre

Taking theatre improvisation into an organizational setting serves as an invitation to spontaneous action in collaboration with members of the organization. Working with theatre improvisation is not just fiction, and not just a humorous event, but a live engagement, here and now, a paradoxical fictitious reality or real fiction. It is not about taking the theme back to work later, but rather the work with theatre improvisation is an event where people actually change the conversation as they participate in the improvisation, in the interplay of spontaneity and relating as power. Thus, the event is in itself an organizational development activity.

This leads to an exploration of the nature of the risk that lies in the actors' work. In Project Four I refer to Stanislavskij and Johnstone. However, as long as the actors are fairly experienced in the work we are doing, they do not seem to perceive the work with theatre improvisation in itself as risky. For the work to actually become paradoxically fictitious and real at the same time, the actors need to work hard to understand the issues among people in the audience. The more we can adopt the attitude of participants from the organization, the more we understand of their conflicts, tensions, and disagreements, the more risky the work is felt for the actors. The actors' ability to take other people's attitudes can be based on general experience from a variety of jobs in the past, or it can be from actual

experience with the specific organization. For actors it is felt risky when you know that an actual step you are in the middle of taking on stage is touching a conflict you know of between some people in the room. At the same time, it is by doing this that the patterning of conversation can change. Therefore I argue that the movement towards knowing more about what is going on is a movement towards being consultants at the same time as they are actors. Through the last years we have increasingly been working with this, getting to know more and more about what is going on, a development that is challenging and influencing the actors' identities as well as my own.

The power configuration also changes among the actors and me. In Project Four I mention a situation where we were reflecting upon the work we had just done. In this situation I suddenly felt vulnerable and found myself questioning the direction our work takes. I realise that in situations like this is we are negotiating our identity. The movement we are in the middle of not only qualifies the actors and myself to take significant steps, but at the same time recreates an old pattern where we all expect the consultant to 'consult' and the actors to stick to 'acting', because the work has taken a turn that makes it more difficult for the actors to recognise the work they are doing. Consequently the work is challenging their identity as actors, as well as mine as consultant. But these conversations are also encouraging; it was in such a conversation that the theme of feeling their work risky emerged, which I had been struggling with for a longer time when writing Project Four.

5.5.2 Postmodernist approaches to theatre in organizations

In the projects I have not examined postmodernist approaches to theatre in organizations as such. However, a significant strand of organizational research is done in the postmodernist tradition, and theatre has had a significant impact in which power is seen as important. In the following I will explore central parts of this work, reflecting on differences in my approach.

5.5.2.1 *Reflecting on postmodernist ontology*

Before I do this, let me briefly summarise key points in postmodern thinking as referred by Chia (1995). He says that modern organizational understanding is ontology of *being* where postmodern is ontology of *becoming*. This implies a 'processual, heterogeneous and emergent configuration of relations' (ibid: 594). Chia mentions that the very idea of organization becomes problematic just as self-identities become problematic, because we then forget to think of *micro-practices of organising*, which contribute to the appearance of unity, identity and permanence of social phenomena. Instead of looking at intentions, it is important to accept that things just happen. In doing this postmodernists focus very much on language: Chia mentions how the English language tends to encourage reifications.

This is similar to the position I take in this thesis. I also focus on emergence, and argue that local micro-interactions, the result of which cannot be anticipated, form organizations as human action. However, the postmodernists deconstruct the concept of human self and explain this in what Chia calls more primary interactional terms, where individuals are seen as social effects that appear to us as entities because of the deliberate concealment of the heterogeneous networking that is going on. Based on Mead I claim that selves exist, emerging in social relationships where spontaneity is important. We do have intentions/gesturing that change in our interactions with each other. I see knowledge as self-knowledge, the paradoxical social understanding of self. I have argued that power and spontaneity are paradoxically linked because power is created in the movement of spontaneous action as well as in its constraint of spontaneous activity. This way of thinking is an ontology of becoming and being at the same time: being is understood to emerge in the becoming, and becoming apart from being is senseless.

Chia defines the purpose of postmodern analysis as follows:

The task for postmodern organizational analysis is, therefore, precisely to sift through these sedimented layers of abstracted concepts in order to make contact with the implicate organizational reality beyond ... Adopting this theoretical orientation requires a crucial revision in one's cognitive style.

(Ibid: 594)

‘Reality beyond’ must mean that something ‘real’ is actually there, and the job of the postmodern analyst is to reveal it. As I can also recognise in the following about understanding organizational theatre, there seems to be an assumption of an outsider’s position from which analysis can be carried out. This is very different from the way I understand emergence, and what in these projects I have called transformative causality.

5.5.2.2 *Theatre in the postmodern tradition*

The *Journal of Organizational Change Management* had in 2001 a special edition focusing on ‘Dramatizing and Organizing’. In the editorial, Oswick et al. wrote:

In the solution-driven world of consultancy, drama can assist the consultant in attempts to overcome uncertainty, eschew ambiguity and reassure clients by presenting his/her wares as the ‘right’ answer. Insofar as they attempt to create a single, unequivocal version of events and circumstances, ‘corporate dramaturgy’ and ‘consultant spin’ bear all the hallmarks of the modernist legacy.

The critical/postmodern treatment of drama is very different. Indeed, it takes an antithetical stance. In contrast to corporate usage, which attempts to project a singular positive dominant reality, the critical/postmodern researchers use drama to undermine and challenge such dominant views.

(Oswick et al., 2001: 220)

Oswick et al. ask rhetorically whether dramaturgical ends should be a modernist tool or a postmodernist form. They are taking a clear stance in this dichotomy: ‘dramatism is excellent to evidence *the analytic potential* of exploring organising as a postmodern phenomenon (i.e. as multi-voiced and constituted by a complex array of alternative realities)’ (ibid: 221, my italics).

I agree with the criticism of using theatre to try to give ‘right’ answers. However, I do not agree with what Oswick et al. see as the alternative – dramatism as a postmodern form. In this approach, what seems important is *analytically to demonstrate* the equivocality in organizations. It proposes a main task that is set from a position on the outside, such as a researcher or consultant, who are expected to deconstruct the prevailing discourse.

In the light of this I will examine the use of theatre in postmodern literature. In a recent published paper, Clark and Mangham (2004) refer to four approaches to theatre in organization studies, namely:

1. use of theatrical texts in programmes on leadership²². (I do not explore this further).
2. *dramatism*, 'which holds that social and organizational life *is* theatre', referring to Kenneth Burke.
3. *dramaturgy*, 'which holds that social and organizational life may be treated *as if* it were theatre', referring to Erving Goffmann.
4. *organizational, radical, situational* or *corporate* theatre that treats theatre not primarily as a resource, an ontology or a metaphor, but as technology.

I will use this as a guide for my reflections on postmodernist literature²³, briefly mentioning the dramatism and dramaturgy, and giving the fourth more attention.

5.5.2.3 *Dramatistic and and dramaturgical approaches to organization*

In 1945 Kenneth Burke wrote *A Grammar of Motives* (Burke, [1945] 1969). Here Burke offers what he calls 'the dramatistic pentad'. According to the dramatistic pentad, complete explanation is characterised by the following five elements:

- Act: what was done?
- Scene: when and where?
- Agent: who did it?
- Agency: how was it done?
- Purpose: why was it done?

Burke is using this tool from dramaturgy to '*reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise*' (ibid: xviii) in organizational life. Reading Burke reminds me of the work of the structuralist Greimas ([1966] 1974), to whom I referred in Project One. In constructing his actantial model, he refers to it as 'a

²² Theatrical texts are used in management training: among others, Olivier (2002) and Whitney & Packer (2000) use Shakespeare's texts as the basis of training. This is not in the postmodernist tradition, but within that tradition Mangham has been utilising Shakespeare's Henry V. Here he focuses on the performances and interpretations of this central character, and in particular on issues of power, leadership, identity, dissemblance and dissimulation (Mangham, 2001).

²³ In structuring literature this way, Clark and Mangham also refer to literature that is not in the postmodernist tradition. However, following this way of structuring is helpful to comprehend the thinking it represents.

grammar of narrative', and in a similar way the dramatic pentad becomes an analytical tool by which one can uncover the apparently hidden motives behind the ambiguity²⁴.

In the 1980s the work of Burke, together with Goffmann's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (see section 3.5.1), initiated a whole range of responses looking at organizations, to which the work of Mangham and Overington is central (1983). In the editorial just mentioned, Oswick et al. refer to Burke and Goffmann as a 'rich source of analogical insight into organizations and organising' (2001: 219).

In another editorial, mentioned in Project Four, Höpfl and Schreyögg²⁵ (2004) acknowledge the work of Mangham and Overington, and their reference to Burke and Goffmann, as essential. In this they say that 'people are not mere performers, but actors who play characters, moving from character to character and from audience to audience with a theatrical consciousness which enables them to retain a concept of an acting self' (ibid: 692). Schreyögg and Höpfl quote Diderot as saying that the actor is a machine without a soul, using this as a metaphor of organizational life where the requirement of everyone is that they 'fake it', performing with simulated intimacy as actors do (ibid: 693)²⁶.

This deconstructionist position has some similarities with my own stance. I am equally interested in hearing many voices; however, I do not see this as an end in itself, but rather as a part of an ongoing movement of sense-making in the work of creating meaning

5.5.2.4 *Theatre as technology*

The last approach Clark and Manghan (2004) mention is the use of theatre in organizations, which they call 'theatre as technology', thus focusing on theatre as

²⁴ In doing this, Burke is not trying to eliminate ambiguity and inconsistency; however, the motives seem to exist as given facts.

²⁵ I have commented on this editorial in section 4.2, where I found that parts of the editorial took a systems thinking approach.

²⁶ I read this as not accepting 'self' as such.

fulfilling specific functions. As I read Clark and Mangham's work, it becomes their task to reveal these functions. One of these is *corporate theatre* by which they mean the use of theatre to promote a particular view from management. Clark and Mangham argue that this use of theatre is intended to promote the views of a particular group, and that it anaesthetises the audience's reaction. They distinguish *corporate theatre* from *organizational theatre*²⁷. Corporate theatre builds on the tradition of Broadway, and 'whilst change is sought in the audience, the nature of that change is strictly controlled and channelled by the piece of theatre'; whereas organizational theatre has different roots – for instance, Brecht and Boal. In corporate theatre the aim is to make the audience *feel*, while in organizational theatre the aim is to make the audience *think*.

In the eyes of Clark and Mangham, *organizational theatre* is a much more interesting approach, especially Boal's forum theatre²⁸. Here Clark and Mangham (2004) reflect upon a piece of theatre they have seen. The work with theatre did not represent anything of immediate concern to the audience, the work displayed 'decorum and a distancing from Boal's original ideas' and 'it was clear that the definition of the problem was imposed upon the audience and the actors carefully corralled the solutions' (ibid: 845). They found no sense of danger, and no sense that anyone was expected to step back from the given in order to pursue radical change. Thus what they saw was akin to a mixture of conventional theatre or role-play and standard training-room practices, and not – as noted by Boal – involving the audience as active *participants*. This is why they refer to this work as 'Boal Lite'.

Clark and Mangham claim that this applies to organizational theatre generally. After having talked with members of theatre groups in North America, the UK and Europe, they conclude:

The actors who claim to use this method perhaps unwittingly cling to a theory of negotiated order that lacks an understanding of power and status.

²⁷ Here Clark and Mangham are referring to Schreyögg's classification; see my Project One (1.3.1.1).

²⁸ Other authors also advocate forum theatre working with 'real' Boal, namely the Theatre of the Oppressed (Coopey, 1998), (Boje et al., 2003), (Nissley et al., 2004).

They appear to believe that, given the right circumstances, social actors can step back from their roles and renegotiate them.

(Ibid: 848).

Clark and Mangham also say that these plays reinforce power and status, and fundamentally ‘these are not plays helping the oppressed break free from oppression’ (ibid: 848). I perceive that Clark and Mangham assess our work as falling into this category. I have met with Clark and talked with him about our work, and he has read my Project One, where I am distancing myself from Boal (see section 1.2.3). He asked for permission to quote the e-mail we received from Boal, where he declined an invitation to work with us because we are working in business, and so working for the oppressors (see section 1.2.3.1). In their paper, Clark and Mangham quote this e-mail in arguing that also Boal distances himself from work of this nature, implying that this is also the work we do. This leaves me in an involved position. At the same time, it becomes very lively and also difficult to distance oneself. However, from this position let me explain how I understand Clark and Mangham’s position on power, and where it differs from mine.

Clark and Mangham conclude: ‘Such an approach fails to create a space within which people can take risks in improvising aspects of their self and social relations within organizations *by exchanging views freely and without concerns about future consequences*’ (ibid: 846, my italics). I understand that they agree with Boal’s concept of the Theatre of the Oppressed. They appear to want a power-free room; in line with this, they refer to dialogue in the following way: ‘for my emancipation from the limitations of my role I need the criticism and backing of free men; only from them can I learn’ (ibid: 849). On the other hand, they argue that ‘the abandonment or temporary suspension of the hierarchy and the formal restraints it supports is difficult given that these plays are always commissioned and approved by senior management within client organizations’ (ibid: 849).

What Clark and Mangham’s writing suggests is that it is not possible to do Boal forum theatre in organizations. They seem to think, that although it would be very good, it ends up being ‘Boal Lite’. I do not see our work in the context of Boal and the Theatre of the Oppressed. It is in the actual meeting that risk-taking can

lead to change, that patterning of conversation can be altered. As a consultant I participate and try to encourage risk-taking - not from an idea that there should be no future consequences, rather the opposite.

5.5.2.5 Reflecting on the roots – Boal and Johnstone

In my first project I formulated a critique of Boal that I have built on through the thesis, and I have summed up this critique in Project Four (section 4.3.1.1). 'Theatre of the Oppressed' implicitly means that there is a liberation, and the way to find this is to work with the oppressed. Forum theatre can give birth to better ways of acting that enable people to change their 'real' life. It seems that a certain postmodernist strand takes this perspective as well.

I realise that neither systems thinking nor the postmodernist position is able to significantly enlighten the nature of the work I think I am involved in with theatre. However, one question keeps coming back to me. As I apparently understand working with theatre differently from Boal, what is it in the work of Boal that has been so highly inspiring for me? In other words, after having negated the approach Boal takes, how can I understand the kind of contribution Boal's work with forum theatre has made to our work?

Marxists argue that Boal is not real Marxist, although he claimed so initially. O'Sullivan argues that Boal is more Hegelian than Marxist, because he is working with ideas as a vehicle for change:

It would appear that Boal has shifted quite significantly from the radical socialist position he at least appeared to support in his early writings (1979) to the strongly reformist bureaucratic stance he currently adopts, and has done now for quite some time.

(O'Sullivan, 2001: 95)

Although Boal has not distanced himself from the concept of 'Theatre of the Oppressed', I can recognise a significant change in his own reflections. When he became a member of the city council and openly supported Lula Da Silva as president of Brazil, he began to use the term 'legislative theatre'. By taking this step, I think Boal is becoming involved in the same way as we are in our work. He

cannot any longer talk solely about the oppressed who he wants to help; he finds himself in the midst of the hurly-burly of moving towards an unknown future with the people around him. In the prologue to *Legislative Theatre – Using Performance to Make Politics*, Boal reflects on this:

I am a man of theatre: now that I am directly involved in politics I use the means at my disposal – the stage! The Legislative Theatre is a new system, a more complex form, since it includes all the previous forms of Theatre of the Oppressed plus others which have a specifically parliamentary application.

(Boal, 1998: 5)

I think that Boal's forum theatre has been useful, because the way of working invites the participants to stay with a difficult situation, although fictitious, while at the same time trying to change it, by inviting to spontaneity. Although Boal thinks differently about power, his way of working inevitably implies that this kind of theatre works with the relations of dependency among people in the room, which I see as power. Therefore forum theatre has served as an excellent conceptual take-off for the development of which I have been a part.

5.5.2.6 *Reflecting on theatre improvisation*

Through the projects I have seen Johnstone's view of theatre improvisation as challenging Boal's thoughts. I have argued for an analogy between theatre improvisation and the way Mead understands communication as processes of gesturing / responding in which we co-create sense. However, our work with theatre improvisation is different from Johnstone's in the way that we also include the responses of participants from client organizations, with the intention of addressing the theme in question. The actors need to adopt the attitude of the participants, and include this in the work in a way that is not seen in the theatre sport inspired by Johnstone. Johnstone does theatre improvisation 'for its own sake'. Therefore our work becomes risky in another sense than does typical theatre improvisation, which makes a significant difference also in the way that the actor sees himself.

So, although Johnstone has served as an important inspiration, the character of our work has never been pure theatre improvisation. In hindsight I can see that trying

to understand this was guiding me in Project Four to focus on what I called the nature of the risk that actors are running in the kind of work we are doing.

5.6 Dialectical movement of thought as a social act – reflections on methodology

At the beginning of my work with this thesis I was encouraged to read certain literature about methodology, but I soon realised that my way of reflecting and writing could not be squeezed into an already prescribed methodology. I have therefore chosen to explore methodology reflectively. In doing so I will take up the essential questions of research method.

- How do I understand and account for the production of knowledge by doing the work of this thesis, and how do I validate or legitimise what I say I know?
- In what ways is my approach similar to and different from that of other research methodologies?
- How do I describe the ideology that runs through this thesis?
- How do I account for my thinking about ethics?

I have argued that organization, society and individual identity are not ‘there’ as reifications, but can be understood as constantly emerging in the processes of relating. Research then becomes, as Stacey and Griffin point out (2004c), *reflection of micro detail in my experience of interaction with others*. Stacey and Griffin note that most of the qualitative research approaches ‘preserve something of the stance of the objective observer, where the researcher’s emotions and fantasies are to be kept out of the research as much as possible’ (Stacey and Griffin, 2004c: 2). It does not make sense to describe methodology in terms of me as external observer and I have tried to work with this the other way around, to notice my emotions and try to make sense of them. Research then becomes a *paradox of detached involvement* for me as the researcher. I see this paradox in the light of *thought as dialectical movement*, which is key in my thinking. But before doing this I will look briefly at some of the approaches that can be found in the literature, and consider the differences from my approach.

5.6.1 Participative inquiry

In project two I argued that working with this thesis is radically different from the way I had to write when drafting a scientific paper for *Nature*. Here I am not confirming or rejecting a hypothesis, which was the detached and objective way of writing I had to use when I was doing my PhD in toxicology²⁹. As Stacey and Griffin point out, in qualitative research there is now a general acceptance that intervening in the organisational system in order to change it is an appropriate method of understanding it (Stacey and Griffin, 2004c).

A main approach to this is *participative inquiry* as proposed by Reason and his colleagues. This covers several different traditions. Reason (1994) links three main approaches to participative inquiry, namely *co-operative inquiry* (Reason and Heron, 1986), with roots in humanistic psychology, *participative action research* (Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991) with roots in enlightenment and awakening of common people, and *action science and action inquiry* (Torbert, 1991) with roots in systems thinking in the style of Argyris and Schön (Argyris and Schön, 1978). In all three strands the participative element is strong, and all three accept a connection between the observer and the observed. However, the way I am working differs substantially from all of them and from the assumptions behind them.

Co-operative inquiry: thinks of people as authors of their own actions, and sees intentions and intelligent choices as causes of behaviour. This links with the individual humanistic psychology it is rooted in, and is very different from the way I have described the emergence of organization and identity. Furthermore, the methodology splits propositional and practical knowing, reifying the notion of knowledge, which is also different from my understanding of knowledge as being continuously constructed and reconstructed.

²⁹ In Project Two I reflect about my research 25 years ago in the field of natural science. Then too, I was working with intentions and certain passions that influenced the work, and so the intended positivist style became not a research method but an *enabling constraint*.

Participative action research: has an emancipatory aim. In this methodological approach it is assumed that whoever one decides to work with is an entity with the same objective interests, concerning which the researcher must take an ideological position. I see Boal in this tradition, and my critique of his way of thinking of Theatre of the Oppressed is also valid for this kind of research.

Action science and action inquiry: the researcher is assumed to sometimes participate in the system and at other times stand outside the system as the researcher. This way of systems thinking has its roots in Bateson's approach, which I have reflected upon in Project Two. Second-order systems thinkers acknowledge an interconnection between the observer and the observed. As I have noticed several times in this thesis, this concept of 'observer–observed' is different from mine because I work with a different perspective of participation. Where second-order systems thinkers mean participation for the good of the system, for me participation means relating to humans I meet.

Reason sees an ontology common to all three strands that is about developing a sense of empowerment and competence. If we all participate in working for the good, Reason assumes that we will obtain a more collaborative relation and a world with a better ecology; a better world. In this argument it is assumed that we can predict a behaviour that will lead to a result we want. Stacey and Griffin comment upon action research in the following way: 'within this holistic and systemic framework, ethics then takes the form of thought, the formulation of a hypothesis about Kantian universal categorical imperatives, before action' (Stacey and Griffin, 2004d). Griffin (2002: 210) mentions that thinking of a 'whole' outside the experience of interaction between people, makes it feel natural to blame something outside our actual interaction – we become to believe that we are victims, and we become allowed to escape feeling responsible for our own actions.

5.6.2 Ethics and ideology

Accepting insights from complexity science, one cannot expect to foresee the result of one's action. In line with this I have been describing conversational relating as *destructive and constructive* at the same time in a way that cannot be foreseen. This is only in hindsight that we can judge action, however, as humans we do make judgements about action and intentions – our own and others' – also before we know the outcome; in the light of *power as dependency*. This obviously happens in the processes of inclusion and exclusion.

In Project Two I referred to Mead's notion of values, on the basis of Griffin's work about self-organization and ethics (Griffin, 2002). Mead distinguishes between 'cult values' and 'functionalised values'. We idealise certain values, which become cult values; the cult provides a feeling of an enlarged personality from which each individual derives their value as a person. However, when conflict arises in daily interaction these idealised values are challenged and negotiated; out of this interaction functionalised values emerge, and in the functionalising the cult values gradually change. Griffin mentions that *functional ethics is this negotiation* (ibid: 211). So in our daily life, we renegotiate our fundamental values, and thereby change them as a part of the ongoing conversation. Ethics emerges and acquires meaning as we work. This leaves me with a very specific ethical responsibility: to feel responsible for acting into what is happening, and to take risks of spontaneity and invitations to spontaneity in the present interdependent relating that I am a part of.

5.6.3 Dialectical movement of thought

In Project Two I reflected about dialectic thinking as a part of my methodology. I referred to Rescher (1977), who works with dialectic as a tool for testing a thesis. I reject this way of arguing, because he splits articulation from substantiation. For me the dialectical thinking is a *method of inquiry*. In the following I will reflect upon this in the light of dialectical thinking as I understand how it has developed from Heraclitus through Hegel to Mead and Adorno.

5.6.3.1 Heraclitus

Heraclitus lived around 500 BC and is seen by Plato (and Aristotle) as the source of the flux doctrine: ‘Heraclitus, I believe, says that all things go and nothing stays, and comparing existents to the flow of a river, he says you could not step twice into the same river’ (Graham, 2002). For this reason Heraclitus is usually referred to as if he is saying that everything is constantly changing, and for thinking paradoxically that everything both *is* and *is not* at the same time. Actually Heraclitus said ‘On those stepping into rivers the same other and other waters flow’. By this he means that *different* waters flow in rivers *staying the same*, meaning that the river is a river *because* the waters are always changing, otherwise it would be a lake or a pond; there is an antithesis between ‘same’ and ‘other’, which is what forms a river (Graham, 2002). Heraclitus is thus pointing to what makes the river recognisable. It becomes a river only because of movement of the water. Graham mentions that Heraclitus understands opposites as necessary for life, but in his eyes they are unified in a system of balanced exchanges, and he is merely playing with paradoxes to make humans think (ibid).

5.6.3.2 Hegel

Hegel was inspired by Heraclitus, but he kept working with *human reasoning*, which he found to be temporal; emerging in the relation between subject and object. For Hegel knowledge is not there as *understanding*, because understanding distinguishes the properties of things and sticks to these distinctions: knowledge is *reasoning*, which undermines the distinctions of understanding (Vesela, 1997). Oppositions exist at the same time, and movement of thought is created and sustained through the movement and rearrangement of these oppositions. Therefore knowledge cannot be a reified thing. In his *Phenomenology*, Hegel considers our relation to objects as temporal. He insists that such a subject–object process is going on, and that this series of processes must exhibit the difference. ‘This is a tree’ is a statement that only holds true until one looks at something else; then ‘this’ is no longer a tree. Hegel elaborates this into three steps:

1. I point out the 'Now', and it is asserted to be truth. I point it out, however as something that *has been*, or as something that has been superseded; I set aside the first truth.
2. I now assert as the second truth that it *has been*, that it is superseded.
3. But what has been, *is not*; I set aside the second truth, its *having been*, its supersession, and thereby negate the negation of the 'Now', and thus return to the first assertion, that the 'Now' is. The 'Now', and pointing out the 'Now', are thus so constituted that neither the one nor the other is something immediate and simple, but a movement which contains various moments.

(Hegel, [1807] 1977: 64-65)

In these moves, the subject cannot maintain the distinction. These steps in reasoning are the *movement of thought* as Hegel points out. In the third move thought becomes reflected into itself and therefore differs from the first, which becomes where the subject finds himself in reflecting that he has changed his relationship with the object. Where Heraclitus stressed that the river stayed the same because of flowing waters, Hegel recognises that our thinking is never the same, but moves on in the processes of negating and negating the negation, which takes into consideration that the antithesis is paradoxically a part of the thesis – that which is negated. In essence, this is Hegel's dialectic.

Mead (1936) notices that what the philosophers, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel are working with is *identity*. For Hegel the most abstract concept is being in itself. We cannot describe what that is. Describing 'being' would mean that we empty out everything that could be included in 'being', but as Hegel said, this is 'not being'. In trying to describe 'being' we end in 'not being', so 'being' in a pure sense is the same as 'not being', they are identical. But we can find being in the processes of becoming, in the continuous relating to objects, where we recognise differences as constantly emerging. For Hegel identity is found in this *movement* of the relation between the subject and the object. In taking these steps, humans find their identity, and achieve a larger self.

Hegel was working with relations among humans, and he said that we recognise our self by recognising others, by mutual recognition. This inspired Mead who has then elaborated his notion of how, in relations among humans, one finds identity: namely in the processes of gesturing and responding. It is obvious, against this

background, that knowledge can only be self-knowledge, but in the particular understanding of self as essentially social.

This is another way of understanding human relations to the world than that taken by Kant. According to Kant's philosophy, we as humans can never see the world as it is – *das ding an sich*. But human intellect acknowledges that there must be a 'real' world, that through reasoning we can categorise time, room, causality. Through intellect we can try to understand nature as a system, a system that has its own causality. What we can see is *das ding für mich*. But unlike Hegel, this opposition does not move. We experience the phenomenal world, but behind is the real, the nominal world, that we can never see. What we can do as humans is to create a *system* by which we grasp the world, which is not to be taken for the real world. This is knowledge, and we can build up our system by using analysis and synthesis. However, since this cannot explain human freedom and choice, Kant also introduces another causality for human action, and that is a rationalist causality. As humans we can think what we want, and do it. Humans are, according to Kant, acting towards autonomously chosen goals, and these choices are what introduce change. What is ethical in these choices has to do with one's duty, and we are judged by our intentions in human action, because there is an existing universal ethos that can be understood and followed by all. This ensures stability when humans act. As Griffin with Stacey and Shaw notes, this is a *both/and* position: to understand the world by natural laws is the one, to understand human freedom is the other (Stacey et al., 2000, Raffnsøe, 1996, Holmgaard, 1999). This is completely different from the way that Hegel argues. We constantly relate to the real world, and by doing this it changes for us in the relating – and this is real and genuine change, not just a change in our perception.

5.6.3.3 *Negative dialectics*

In Project Two I also refer to Adorno and his notion of *negative dialectics* (Adorno, [1966] 2000). Adorno takes up Hegel's thought: he argues that *truth, and what you know* can only be understood negatively. For Hegel the movement of dialectical thought would end in a universal or absolute spirit or mind, meaning *the whole of which all things are reflections* (Stacey, 2003b). This is rejected by

Adorno. He had experienced fascism, and saw that it is in the fascination with the idealised whole that ethics fail (Griffin, 2002). Adorno is – in line with Hegel – rejecting the scheme of thesis–antithesis–synthesis. This means that we cannot expect any positive or logical truth to come out of conflict. What we know, what we find as true, is given by the endless dialectical contradictions in which we find ourselves embroiled. Rejecting the synthesis means that there will be no positive knowledge in the end. As I bump up against a way of thinking or a way of working, I have to work with it, drawing upon my own experience. In this negation, the statement and its opposite are phases of one inseparable act, and no simple answers are given. You have to live with the reality that nothing might come out of your struggling, and you might not know which way things will turn; but knowing – and hope – lies in the struggling. I sense a resonance with complexity science with its emphasis on the break of symmetry and the unpredictability of the future.

For ethics, according to Mead’s notion of values, this means that as humans it is important to constantly deconstruct ‘cult values’. Ideology appears and must be dealt with. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno says:

The division of the world into important and unimportant matters (...) should be followed up to the point where it is convicted of its own untruth. The division which makes everything objects must itself become an object of thought, instead of guiding it.

(Adorno, [1951] 1974: 125)

Here Adorno encourages the constant deconstruction of truth, by making that which is taken for granted an object of thought. In this process, ‘the splinter in your eye is the best magnifying glass’ (ibid: 50). Do not ignore the details that disturb you; stay with it and see what happens. Griffin (Griffin, 2002: 164) notices that this becomes an ongoing definition of that which is true in the conflict of the present moment. For me this legitimises using one’s own experience and emotions in finding ‘truth’. Adorno says that

...knowledge comes to us through a network of prejudices, opinions, innovations, self-corrections, presuppositions and exaggerations, in short

through the dense, firmly-founded but by no means uniformly transparent medium of experience.

(Adorno, [1951] 1974: 80)

Adorno does not go into how this actually happens in daily life. I see that he understands this movement as taking place primarily within the individual. He is not taking the step of understanding self as essentially social, emerging in the micro-interaction in daily life, that Mead takes. I understand the emergence of what Adorno mentions in this quote in terms of gesture–response, with spontaneity and power involved, which means that these processes are essentially social. *Therefore it only makes sense for me to understand the dialectical movement of thought as essentially social.*

5.6.3.4 *Movement of thought as a social phenomenon*

If the subject is a thing, then we can speak of it as that which attempts to analyze itself and must always fail. If the subject is a phase in a process, the entire difficulty is gone. It is not trying to analyze itself as a thing. The analysis is but a moment in the movement of consciousness, and is directed toward the analysis and synthesis of objects lying in consciousness.
(Mead, 1901)

Reading this, it is obvious that Mead was influenced by Hegel. As previously mentioned, Hegel argues that we acquire self-consciousness and self-recognition through the recognition of and by another, through mutual recognition. It is on this basis that Mead has developed his thought. I see this thought in turn as a way of understanding how this dialectical movement of thought happens: namely, in conversational interaction.

As I have said earlier, because spontaneity is involved in the processes of gesturing–responding, conversation takes a turn that is surprising and twists the original intention: conversations are never fully under anyone’s control. In my projects the narratives consist primarily of such situations of interrupted interaction, what I could call *incomplete conversation* with reference to my reflections in Project

Two about speech context³⁰. In trying to make sense of a methodology and the emergence of my language about it I have gradually come to appreciate this incompleteness of the relational conversations, because in the midst of power and spontaneity dialectical *reasoning* is going on. It is in these incomplete conversations that reasoning and justification takes place, whether publicly (as conversation) or privately (as internal conversation (thought)). It is here that spontaneity occurs and ethics are functionalised. My responsibility is to take the splinter in my eye into consideration and see what happens.

Stacey mentions that Kant distinguishes between *understanding*, which is concepts and categories as an active, a priori intellectual faculty outside space and time, and *sensibility*, which is intuition, a passive a posteriori sensing faculty in space and time (Stacey, 2003b). He mentions that ‘the problem is how we can know that the a priori concepts of understanding apply to the a posteriori intuitions of sensibility’ (ibid: 205).

I think that accepting Kant’s way of understanding sensibility³¹ as a posteriori is a key problem, because it changes from paradoxical to both - and, by shifting the frames of experience and splitting sensing from thinking. The aesthetic judgement becomes private. Furthermore, I think that directly translating sensibility as intuition can be problematic, because it easily leaves us with this judgement as a kind of mystical, unexplainable ‘something’ that goes on in the individual. The work I have done about spontaneity links sensibility with thinking in a very different way, namely to similarly cognitively unrecognized processes of gesturing–responding.

³⁰ In Project Two I refer to Nienkamp (2001), who on the basis of Mead and Vygotsky proposes a notion of speech context. In high speech context situations the interlocutors know each other well and speech becomes disconnected and incomplete. In low speech context situations speech the interlocutors are alien to each other. I see our work with theatre as a way of establishing high context situations.

³¹ 50 years before Kant, Baumgarten developed a theory about aesthetics where beauty is not seen as a perfect state or linked to feelings of pleasure or delight. Instead it is seen as an activity that he calls *cognitio sensitiva*. Beauty is seen as a process of relating in the present, which will always be incomplete (Gross, 2002). Baumgarten acknowledges this as a legitimate source of knowledge that is linked to intellectual recognition. Kant was inspired by Baumgarten, but took his work down a different route when he distinguished between what can be sensed and what can be thought (Holmgaard, 1999).

5.6.4 Writing the thesis

It is easy to recognise that working with the projects and the synopsis has for me been a truly dialectical movement of thought. The four projects are written over a span of time; each of them has been through numerous readings and reflections; they have been read by several people, not just in the learning set but also by colleagues, supervisors, my wife and others; this happened even for very early drafts that hardly had made sense for others than me. I have realised that in the process of talking about them they have changed and improved as well as my understanding. As mentioned in Project Two, in the process of writing I have also recognised new bifurcation points, where reasoning led to movement of the argument; in this the writing has become a means of challenging my internal conversation.

It is not by coincidence that I reflected about methodology as a part of writing Project Two. In the writing I felt that my thoughts really were moving in this kind of reasoning, working, reflecting, writing, discussing with others, and writing again. However, there came a point where I had to pull it together and present a line of argument through the project. I could not help thinking that by doing this my writing would somehow fail to express my way of working because it came to look more like a linear line of argument – contrary to the process of creating the project, which has been much more complex. This feeling continued with the other projects, although I have come to admit that the constraint of expressing a line of argument is also a movement of thought. In the end I have edited the projects, removed some words etc. But I have tried not to alter the line of argument within each of them, in order to be able to follow and reflect upon these in the synopsis – where I could finally consider the movement of thought as I now see it.

5.6.5 Summing up key questions about methodology

Knowledge is produced in the movement of thought, which is experience. However, my experience is always part of the web of relations I am involved in, and as my self is essentially social, my self-knowledge also emerges as the movement of these relations. The *validation* of my choices in this thesis is closely linked to what I struggle with, and what I find important. However, it must resonate with

the experience of others. In my work this means my relations to colleagues, especially the actors I work with every day – and clients. When it comes to the written words, it has to make sense for others. At first my peers, who have followed the writing, and my supervisors; later, the readers. As Stacey and Griffin point out, it must be justifiable in terms of a wider context of thought that the community being addressed finds persuasive, or at least plausible (Stacey and Griffin, 2004d). In my understanding, this depends on whether what I have written resonates with the reader's experience.

According to Elias, ideology is produced in the processes of inclusion and exclusion, and in this work the *ideology* is obviously not completely transparent for me. Obviously I idealise not understanding knowledge as a thing, but in terms of movement, in the ordinary daily interaction with others. I idealise difference and conflict as necessary for movement of thought, and I idealise the negation of wholes and systems in understanding being and becoming. However, I am not idealising a purely sceptical position, because in the work of finding mutual recognition and resonance there is a constant movement.

The ethics is about being aware of the splinter in the eye, and acting into what it brings to the present. In the writing this has led to an ongoing awareness about for whom the writing is intended. During the work I have paid careful attention to confidentiality, and in the end all cases with clients are anonymised to a degree where it will not be possible to identify individuals or companies. Therefore I have decided to make this thesis available to the public and have several times considered sending some of the material to clients. It might have been a good invitation to continue conversation, but I have decided to wait until I have finished the writing. Over time, I have discussed the key themes with my colleagues, who not only know how I am involving them, but have also had the opportunity to read the whole thesis.

5.7 Concluding on change in my thinking and working

5.7.1 Reflecting on my position three years ago

One of the reasons I felt attracted to the use of theatre improvisation was because of its evident *spontaneity*. In my work as a consultant I had already found that situations without a pre-given result were much more interesting and full of potential. As a consultant I have found myself noticing *power* in the relations of which I was a part. Taking part in discussions on the impact of our work with theatre, I was met with individualistic, cognitive explanations. Ultimately, real change was explained in terms of each individual, and power was not reflected on. As I felt uncomfortable with this, it has been very satisfying to delve into these themes. At the same time I was in a very lively development of our work together with the actors, and in understanding the work with theatre improvisation.

5.7.2 Where do I find myself now?

Throughout my work on this thesis I have also participated in the continuous development of our consultancy together with the actors, one of whom has simultaneously undertaken the same programme, finishing with an MA. In the mix of relating to clients, actors, peers, and supervisors, and meeting the demands of reflexive writing, my understanding of the themes of spontaneity and power has shifted, along with my ability to talk about what happens in our work with theatre.

Firstly, my understanding of communication has changed. I have come to see communication in the light of Mead's terms of gesturing – responding as one act in which intentions are emerging and changing as we relate to each other. I have been able to take a step I recognise as important, in understanding self as essentially social. I think that constantly working in the vicinity of actors improvising at work has been important for this change in my thinking, because of the close link I see between theatre improvisation and this way of understanding communication.

My work with theatre has been focused on change of perspective, encouraging people to put themselves in each other's place. Although I have found myself do-

ing this work, I have had some difficulty explaining why this was important, apart from the argument that the diversity in itself is important. I have come to understand that taking the attitude of the other is what creates selves. As I have come to understand self as essentially social, I see the work with theatre as sense-making, a social process in which we will inevitably continue making different sense as we move together. I see my critique of postmodernist thinking in this light. I accept that in the creation of meaning, multiple meanings will emerge, which earlier I might have accepted as 'the goal' in itself. I now accept that in making sense together I have intentions that also change in the process of creating meaning – for myself and for others.

I see spontaneity as essential in sense-making. By this I mean acting without being in control of one's own acting in the social processes of relating. What one remembers of the past influences spontaneous action. I think that the main shift is that I have come to see spontaneity as essentially relational, social and processual. It is felt risky to participate in spontaneous action when it is difficult to anticipate the response of the other to what is happening. We can *invite* to spontaneity by deliberately acting into situations in ways where we become unsure of the other's response. Such invitations are felt to be risky. This way of expressing spontaneity has developed through the projects, but has found its form here in the synopsis. This might seem speculative, but for me it has obvious implications. This is in contrast to the mainstream understanding of spontaneity, which understands it as purely individual, and therefore considers spontaneity primarily as a skill.

I see power as dependency. Because human action is social, we are dependent on each other. Also power is relational, a process of taking others' attitudes, in which gossip and ideology have a part to play. This means that change cannot happen without some change in power relations. I have come to see this as very different to the mainstream views of power, which understands power as potential and one-sided, a tool for working with intentions already formed.

Power and spontaneity are linked: spontaneity challenges power configurations at the same time as spontaneity goes on in the midst of them. The nature of the risk-taking linked with spontaneous activity and invitation to spontaneity is thus the risk of change, including change in relationships and identity. However, it is in these movements that we recognise each other and ourselves, in a paradox where spontaneity both changes and recreates the dependency of power relation, at the same time as this power relation restricts and enables the inclination to spontaneity. Realising this has been fundamental to my way of understanding consultancy.

Theatre improvisation is an invitation to spontaneity, and people tend to experience it as less risky since we are working with fiction. I have shown that most of the ways researchers understand theatre in organizations tend to explain it in ways that do not accept the possibility of an immediate change happening. I claim that power relations are at stake as we work, because the fiction is met with reality; the response is real. Therefore working with this kind of theatre is organizational consultancy. The risk does not disappear, however, and at the moment I am very interested in understanding the nature of risk for the actors and myself in our work as it changes, an area I have just touched upon at the end of Project Four.

5.7.3 Recognising change in my practice

I recognise what I see as huge changes in our way of working with clients, and in the way clients respond. The quality of relationship with clients changes. I have addressed this several times through the projects and also in various places in this synopsis, for example in coming back to the organization I wrote about in Project One.

I can recognise discourses different from my own much more clearly than before. I remember a sense of restlessness before I was able to articulate the differences for myself. I recognise that I now relate in a more relaxed way, since I am now confident that while going through the movement of our meeting I will somehow find a way to relate that addresses what I consider important.

In doing this, I am aware of the theme of power. This is not new, although the reflections I have articulated have sharpened my awareness. I can recognise a feeling from meetings where I have found myself stuck in thinking very much about power but not knowing how to talk about it, so that I was not able to participate in a lively way. I now find myself addressing power relations without getting stuck; this is often greeted with an unsettled response, but nevertheless with an acceptance to take up the given issue.

At the Dacapo Theatre I see a movement in our work towards clients recognising our work as consultancy. This is of vital importance for the company, and the movement just described has contributed significantly to this.

5.7.4 Contributing to knowledge in communities working with an understanding of organizational change

From the position I have taken in this portfolio knowledge is inevitably self-knowledge in the social understanding of self. From this perspective ‘contribution to knowledge’ makes sense only if others will be able to recognize my writing as different from what can be found elsewhere. Furthermore, it has to resonate with their own experience.

I am confident that those working with organizational change can recognize this work as an original invitation to think differently about two themes, namely: about the link between spontaneity and power, and about the understanding of change in processes of working with organizational theatre.

5.7.4.1 Spontaneity and power in organizations

As presented in the portfolio understanding spontaneity as essentially social in the processes of co-creating meaning builds on Mead, as is acknowledged by Stacey, Griffin and Shaw in their theory of complex responsive processes. However, understanding spontaneity as essentially risky – because it challenges power relations – is novel; and paradoxically, the very conditions for the possibility of spontaneity of relating, which we refer to as power, are the result, at any given time, of

this spontaneous relating itself. Furthermore, the notion of invitation to spontaneity itself is novel.

*5.7.4.2 Lessons to be learnt when being a part of an organization
– when leading, consulting or participating in other ways*

In my conversations with others I have experienced a significant difference in the way of thinking of organizations and organizational change. The movement of thought that I have been working with in my understanding of methodology, as essentially social, and the conversational understanding of change, as improvised and transformational, is in my experience very different than explanations people usually take for granted, explanations that rely on a Kantian splitting of my thoughts and (a) reality apart from this process of thinking. This makes it a difficult task to present prescriptive lessons for the community of practice, because people inevitably understand the lessons in the light of the discourse they are working from, i.e. in their given context. Thus the following ‘lessons’ are relational and not prescriptive.

The first lesson is consequently to take your own experience seriously. Because your experience has not emerged in yourself alone – it emerges with others and this is the very basis of experience.

I have learned that many of the same people who think of organization very differently from me at the same time do have experiences that resonate with mine. Another lesson which has emerged for me is the importance for an ongoing conversation that brings in people’s experience, including your own, whereby conflict is not something to be considered negative – to the contrary, it is the very nature of the conversation. One must be aware of small changes in the themes as conversation goes on. You cannot be on top of what is going on, so you will need to react before you are on top of it, and be aware that the responses will interact with your own intentions, although you will of course not be fully aware of how this is going on.

Be prepared to be surprised³². Although this should hopefully be recognizable, you cannot in advance predict what is going to happen. If you can, it might be a waste of time to have the conversation.

Be curious about the themes that are brought up and do not hesitate to draw on your own emotions and experiences as they emerge for you in an attempt to continue the conversation. As others are doing the same the conversation will probably be sensed as very lively, although not necessarily easy.

When doing this you will experience that it can be difficult. You might find it difficult to speak up or you might experience that others are not speaking up. This can be understood in the light of power, certain dependencies are shifting and this is emerging as a change in the quality of conversation. Being in the middle of this you cannot be in control of it, so all you can do is to continue with your contribution to this ongoing sense making and change.

In working for change it might make sense to think of invitations to spontaneity. You can contribute by bringing in what you think might be invitations, or you can recognize and try to amplify the effect of invitations you experience as emerging in the conversation. You can recognize these invitations by the way you react emotionally. You will experience strong invitations by emotions that arise because the theme has taken a turn where it is not possible to easily take the attitude of the other. This might be experienced as fear, anxiety, joy, tension, hope.

Notice the 'splinter in your own eye'. What do you keep coming back to, or what annoys you?. Dare to stick to it, try to explain for yourself what is going on, above all try to bring it into the conversation.

Be aware of your current relationships. How do you – from being in the middle of this sensing of independence and acknowledging of dependency - recognize your gestures as a part of your way of creating wholes, explanations that make sense.

³² I owe this quote to Harrison Owen, who uses this sentence in his 'Open Space Technology'. However, it has a different meaning in this context.

Also be aware that you can never be on top of this - your only chance is to react into it with all your presence and experience and see what happens. This is what Elias takes up in his treatment of the paradox of involvement and detachment. You have to be intensely involved to be detached, and able to detach yourself in order to participate intensely.

5.7.4.3 *Understanding change in processes of working with organizational theatre*

It is novel to understand change when working with organizational theatre as going on in the present because power relations change and because people acknowledge a kind of spontaneity which they usually ignore in everyday life. Understanding fiction and reality as paradoxically linked is an element in the novelty of my argument, and I have shown how this is different from prevalent views on the use of theatre in organizations – whether this derives from different strands of systems theory or from postmodernist thought. I think that this is a major contribution to the discourses of those who are either working with theatre in organizational settings, or carrying out research in this field.

5.7.4.4 *Lessons to be learnt from my work with organizational theatre*

It is my experience that if a fiction is created that people accept as if it “could be real” it is able to perturb people’s reality and ‘agitate’ their current conversation. In working with that kind of fiction in organizations, I have experienced that real change can and will occur spontaneously in the ongoing relating among people. This might easily lead to the conclusion that the fiction has to be “real”, but I hesitate to draw that conclusion.

However, in the work with fiction I am convinced that there is a need for awareness of *presence*. No matter what kind of fiction, the response is informing the fiction and a spontaneous response to that creates the possibility of change in ongoing conversation. So besides creating fiction there is a need for awareness of what is going on when working with it, a point that cannot be overemphasised. Be prepared to look for responses you were not prepared for and be ready to also meet responses you had prepared for in a way that might surprise you.

One can think of the work as invitation to different ways of relating to each other. Normally the term “invitation” leads to thinking that there is a logical response to a certain invitation. The lesson to learn here is that it is extremely important to understand the notion of “invitation” as an emergent phenomenon. New invitations will emerge during the improvised work that precedes or follows a play. And invitations that take form as a play can be more or less rehearsed, but all of this goes on in a present, and the conversations with people in the organization about what to play can also in itself serve as invitations.

When reading about organizational theatre I encourage the reader to be aware of the underlying discourse. I think that one misses the point if one accepts explanations that consider change as something going on in the individuals (many strands of systems thinking) or that does not accept the individual self (different strands of postmodernist thinking).

Fiction can be worked with in many different ways. In our practice we have developed a way of working that draws on the work of Boal and Johnstone. Probably this can be done in many other ways. So I invite the reader to find other ways of working with this and to draw their own conclusions for others forms of consulting.

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