

Copyright Notice

Course of Study: D4 Y2

Pearce, W.B. (2007) Episodes and patterns of communication. IN: Pearce, W.B. (2007) Making social worlds. A communication perspective. Oxford: Blackwell. pp. 131-170

Name of Designated Person authorising scanning: Lise Szwan

IMPORTANT COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

Staff and students of the Tavistock & Portman NHS Trust are reminded that copyright subsists in this extract and the work from which it was taken.

This digital copy should not be downloaded or printed by anyone other than a student enrolled on the named course or the course tutor(s). It has been made under the terms of a CLA licence which allows you to:

- access and download a copy;
- print out a copy;

This Digital Copy and any digital or printed copy supplied to or made by you under the terms of this Licence are for use in connection with this Course of Study. You may retain such copies after the end of the course, but strictly for your own personal use.

No further copying, storage or distribution (including by e-mail) is permitted without the consent of the copyright holder.

The author (which term includes artists and other visual creators) has moral rights in the work and neither staff nor students may cause, or permit, the distortion, mutilation or other modification of the work, or any other derogatory treatment of it, which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author.

DOWNLOADING DEADLINE - PLEASE NOTE:

All extracts are licenced for use by staff and students for the duration of the current academic year or the course (if less than one academic year) after which time they will be deleted in accordance with copyright law. Please therefore ensure you download your readings before the end of your course or the current academic year at the very latest as they will no longer be available to you after this time.

Making Social Worlds

A Communication Perspective

W. Barnett Pearce

THE TAVISTOCK AND PORTMAN
NHS FOUNDATION TRUST LIBRARY
120 BELSIZE LANE
LONDON, NW3 5BA
020 8938 2520

2007

Chapter 6

Episodes and Patterns of Communication

Preview

This chapter describes episodes and forms of communication as complex entities that emerge from the field of speech acts. Episodes may be thought of as sequences of speech acts, punctuated with a beginning and an end, and united by a story. Close attention to the way episodes are made provides us with tools for making better social worlds. Continuing what was started in chapter 5, this chapter describes how consultants, managers, and others can use CMM concepts to meet the challenges they face. To help understand episodes, this chapter presents the concepts of framing, punctuation, emplotment, and contextualization, and begins the introduction of CMM's hierarchy model. "Episode-work" names the processes we use to define or change whatever episode is occurring. Three forms of episode-work are presented: casting or chaotic emergence, realizing through planning and/or rituals, and improvisation. To understand these processes, the chapter describes CMM's concept of emergent interactional logics, introduces some parts of the serpentine model, and further develops the concept of logical force introduced in chapter 5.

Forms of communication may be thought of as clusters of episodes sharing a deep grammar. Best seen as wholes, forms of communication establish the cultural frames in which we live. The chapter ends with three suggestions for using these ideas to make better social worlds.

Social Life is Episodic

Episodes include such things as having dinner with friends; having an annual physical examination with your doctor; and doing a performance review of an employee. They include fights, friendly competition, and collaborative teamwork. If you look at them with a fuzzy focus, all episodes have a common structure. They may be described as sequences of speech acts, punctuated as having a beginning and an end, linked together as a story.

If we are to be competent members of any social group, we have to know how that group punctuates sequences of speech acts and what stories they tell to make these sequences coherent. Take the episodic structure of ordering dinner in a restaurant as an example. In some restaurants, the episode begins when the greeter escorts you to a reserved table. It proceeds through a sequence in which a waiter takes your order, serves your food, brings you a bill, takes your credit card to the cashier, and returns the card and receipt to you. The episode ends when you leave. Perhaps the greeter thanks you for your patronage and asks you to come again soon.

Not all restaurants have the same episodic pattern. There are restaurants in which the preferred episode begins when you enter and take a tray from a stack conveniently provided near a long table bearing a wide variety of dishes. You select the food yourself, find a cashier, pay, find a table and, when you are finished eating, perhaps clean the table yourself and leave.

You are probably familiar with both of these, and the easily achieved challenge is to determine which of these episodes is preferred in the restaurant that you have entered. But there are other possible episodes – as I learned, much to my embarrassment, in what might be called “The Tale of the Angry Waiter.”

Twenty years ago, I was invited to dinner at the prestigious and elegant Automobile Club in Buenos Aires. I saw a long table bearing many dishes and looked for a stack of trays. A smiling waiter walked up to me carrying a tray. I thanked him and tried to take it from him. He pulled it back. I tried again to take it . . . and before we had gotten too far in this tug-of-war, my Argentine friends explained to me that I was taking the waiter’s job from him. I learned that, in this restaurant, I was supposed to walk along the buffet table and indicate what food I wanted so that the waiter

could take it and put it on the tray that he was carrying. When I had all I wanted, I would find an unoccupied table, sit at it, and wait for the waiter to bring the food and serve it. I’m sure that the waiter said some complimentary things about this crazy American who didn’t even know how to act in a classy restaurant.

Can some of the more important areas of our lives be understood as variations of this problem in knowing and performing the appropriate episode? Of course! And these are some of the social skills we need to be a competent member of any human social group. And as we learn and perform these skills, we are shaped by them, becoming the kind of person who belongs to the human social group in which we are participating.

But we are not limited to becoming the person made by the episodes of a particular social group. Sometimes we don’t want to “fit in” to whatever is going on. There are times when we want to, and should, set ourselves to oppose the enactment of a particular episode or to change the episode that is occurring. For example, how can you transform a fight into collaborative teamwork, or a performance evaluation into a constructive mentoring session? Such transformations – I’ll call them “episode work” later in this chapter – require a different order of social skills . . . and the practice of these social skills makes us more sophisticated persons.

Like speech acts, episodes come in clusters. Although the specific content of these episodes might differ – some having to do with work, some play, some entertainment, etc. – there are “family resemblances” among the episodes that adhere to each other. Drawing on some of the concepts introduced in chapter 3, I suggest that we think of these clusters not simply as aggregates (that is, heaps or piles) but as emergent entities. Names for these entities might include national, ethnic, or organizational “cultures,” “society,” “community,” “discursive structures,” “social systems,” or “institutions.” Consistent with my intention to explore what we might gain by taking a communication perspective, I’ll call them “forms of communication.”

Our Social Worlds are Made of Episodes

I first started thinking about episodes in 1972. Valeri Borzov was being interviewed after winning the Olympic gold medals in the 100- and 200-meter sprints. Borzov surprised me when he said that he had written a doctoral dissertation about the 100-meter race – I had never imagined

focusing that much attention on something that is apparently so simple. Describing his strategy for the race, he said that he calculated the number of steps he would take between start and finish-line, and divided the race up into several segments. Again, I had never thought of counting the steps in a race – I just assumed that one started running and kept on running until reaching the finish line. Each of the segments, Borzov told us, presents a specific challenge and requires a different style of running. Without using the term, I realized that Borzov was thinking of the 100-meter race episodically and that this gave him a level of mindfulness and control over his performance that I can only admire from a distance.

At about the same time, I read a remarkable book co-authored by philosopher Rom Harré and psychologist Paul Secord (1973), in which they claimed that “human life” consists of, and can productively be analyzed in terms of, episodes. Their definition of episode seemed to fit Borzov’s description of the 100-meter race, but to be sufficiently general to include other things as well. Episodes, they said, are “any sequence of happenings in which human beings engage which has some principle of unity” (1973: 154). They offered these examples: “buying a chocolate bar in a small shop; bumping into a passer-by, apologizing and going on; reading a book and discussing it with several other people, some of whom have not read it and one of whom pretends to have read it but has not; a change of attitude; the emergence of a leader; a trial; a strike; a playground game, and so on” (1973: 154–5). Another way of defining episodes was given by sociolinguist John Gumperz (1975: 17), who suggested that we look at “communicative routines which [people] view as distinct wholes, separate from other types of discourse, characterized by special rules of speech and nonverbal behavior and often distinguished by clearly recognizable opening or closing sequences.”

Making Episodes

If we want to live in better social worlds, we will have to make them. So how can we make episodes that serve us well?

I want to use the two faces of the process of communication to structure my answer to this question. One part of making episodes has to do with meaning making and management. That is, how do we perceive what episode is happening? Our perceptions of what is happening are under-determined by the facts themselves. It is always possible to interpret the

same event or sequence of events as making up a different episode – or many different episodes. The other part of making episodes has to do with coordinating actions. That is, how can we call into being desirable episodes and/or block the enactment of episodes that are undesirable?

Making/managing meaning: perceiving the flow of experience as episodes

One way of thinking about life is that it is a flow of experience: an unbroken stream of events. Using this metaphor, perceiving episodes is a process in which we mark some points as the “beginning” and “end” of an episode and wrap the speech acts between these points in a story.

The metaphor of the “stream of experience” is very attractive. It sounds so calm, orderly, and peaceful. I wish that life as I know it was so gentle and linear as to constitute a stream. More often, my experience is more like a waterfall or a white-water river furiously crashing down among rocks. Even this metaphor is too one-dimensional. I believe that there are multiple levels of episodes and that even in apparently placid social situations, the act of interpreting what is happening is fateful.

Let me show you what I mean. You met Tina in chapter 5. She’s a frustrated and worried division manager. Among other things, she’s trying to decide how to respond to an email sent by her supervisor, Dennis, telling her both that she must attend a meeting and how to respond to Rolf’s presentation about the new corporate Strategic Initiative. She can’t bring herself to feel, as Dennis told her that she should, “grateful” for what Rolf has done.

Start by trying to give a name to the episode in which Tina finds herself. Do you find a well-developed cultural repertoire of names for this episode? How obvious is it what episode is occurring? In chapter 5, I described some tools for analyzing situations like this; I think that those tools have the potential to enrich Tina’s understanding of what is going on. In this chapter, I’ll provide some more tools. But does understanding the situation in a richer way make the episode easier or more difficult to name and act into?

Any moment in our social worlds can be seen as a part of numerous episodes based on what we know and on what we choose to focus on. The technical name for this is polysemy, or literally, many meanings. It isn’t that one definition is right and the other wrong, but that everything has multiple meanings depending on what you have in view.

Here's a bit more information about Tina, Dennis, and Rolf. If I've written this well, your interpretation of what episode Tina is in as she sits behind the closed doors of her office will change as you read each new bullet point.

- Rolf and Tina had planned to marry when they finished college. Both sets of parents adamantly opposed their marriage on the basis that Rolf and Tina are of different races, religions, and social classes. Shortly after they finished college, Rolf broke off their engagement, saying that he could not bear the disapproval of his parents. Three days later, Rolf announced his engagement to another woman, the daughter of his parents' friends whom Rolf had known all his life. They now have three children, but Rolf doesn't seem very happy. Tina was broken-hearted, has no significant romantic relationship, and scarcely dates. Although both are division managers in the same company, they avoid talking to each other as much as possible.
- When Tina and Rolf were engaged, Dennis was their best friend. Tina has always wondered what role he played in Rolf's decision to break off their engagement. She suspects that Rolf confided in him and that all along he knew what Rolf was planning to do but did not tell her. She has never asked him about his role in their breakup and carefully avoids talking about this part of their history in her interactions with him. While she is friendly with Dennis, she doesn't fully trust him and seeks to keep a bit of distance from him.
- After graduating from college, Tina, Rolf, and Dennis began working for three different organizations. However, in the spate of acquisitions and mergers brought about by globalized markets, the company in which Dennis worked bought the companies in which Rolf and Tina worked. Both Rolf and Tina believe that Dennis used his influence to make sure that they did not lose their jobs during the acquisition.
- Tina is the first and only female division manager in this company, and feels a sense of obligation to other women to succeed. She believes that the senior managers, some of whom expect that she will fail, are watching her very closely.
- Tina's division works in one of the fastest-changing sectors of the global market, and has been profitable until last year. To continue to be profitable, Tina believes that they need a major reorganization, including setting up production and distribution facilities in emerging markets. She is disappointed that senior management has turned down

her requests for a transitional budget to make these changes and fears that the new Strategic Initiative will further divert corporate resources away from her division.

To help understand how Tina – or any of us – can make sense of our social worlds, I suggest four ideas: framing, punctuation, emplotment, and contextualization.

Framing

Alone in her office, Tina might well feel overwhelmed by the task of figuring out just what episode is being played out in Dennis's email. Or, perhaps she thinks that there are many episodes being played out simultaneously, and Dennis's email plays a different role in each. Here are some of the possibilities:

- Dennis is asserting his supervisory responsibility for the strategic initiative;
- Dennis is telling Tina and Rolf that they need to get over their history and start working together;
- Dennis is – again! – siding with Rolf against Tina;
- etc.

For Tina to avoid being overwhelmed, she needs to be able to place the events within an interpretive frame. Frames make “what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful” by arraying it within a meaningful structure (Goffman 1974: 21). The frame selected “allows its user to locate, perceive, identify and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms. . . . It seems that we can hardly glance at anything without applying a primary framework, thereby forming conjectures as to what occurred before and expectations of what is likely to happen now” (1974: 21, 38).

But how do we make or select among these frames? Sociologist Erving Goffman proposes that they “render” – in the sense of “cut” or “tear into pieces” – our social worlds. If we don't push the metaphor too hard, it is a good one. We cannot perceive all of what is going on even in a specific moment. Not only is there just too much happening, but everything that happens has multiple meanings. The only way we can make sense of it is to focus on some things and not others, to foreground some things and

not others, and to see some sequential patterns and not others – in short, to tear out a hunk of it and ignore the rest.

My point is that we never perceive our social worlds completely or as they are. The work we do to perceive episodes is always a process of selection, and involves the act of tearing as well as stitching things together again.

Punctuation

Punctuation refers to the process of dividing and organizing interactions into meaningful patterns. It is a specific way of framing, involving identifying the beginnings and the end of an episode (Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson 1967).

Choosing from among all the available possibilities what you will take as the “beginning” of an episode is fateful, as I was recently reminded. My colleague Frank Barrett and I were preparing to teach a graduate seminar on the intellectual development of social constructionism for the students at Fielding Graduate University. We knew how we wanted to end the story, but were very aware that the meaning of the ending depends, in part, on where the story began. Some of the possible starting points that we considered were the publication of Berger and Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality* in 1966, John Locke and the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century, and Plato and Aristotle in classical Greece. Depending on this choice, our story would be like Cronen’s (1998) “Cleaning up the wreckage of the psychology project” or “Building on Berger and Luckmann.” In this case, Frank graciously allowed me to start the seminar with a presentation about the pre-Socratic Greeks; the story I told might be named “Extending some ideas from the Sophists into the era of globalization.”

I felt pretty good about this way of punctuating the story for a week or two, until one of the students in the seminar asked me how the story would be different if it had started even earlier. The Sophists, she said (with enough footnotes to warm any teacher’s heart), borrowed many ideas that had been in circulation in Egyptian culture, which was already ancient at the time of the Sophists, and many of these ideas were borrowed from even older sub-Saharan African cultures.

She was absolutely right, of course, and this created a critical moment for me. I had to decide whether to search for the “true beginning” of the story of the intellectual development of social constructionism, or

to say that there is no “real” beginning.¹ I chose the latter, and would like to believe that it was because I don’t believe that this or any other story has a “true beginning” and not that I’m just too lazy to continue my research. At any rate, if you hear me lecture in the future about the development of social constructionism, I will begin with “In one way of telling this story . . .”

I’ve become very sensitive to the fictitiousness of the terms “in the beginning . . .” and “the end.” To say that these are “fictitious” is not to say that they are wrong, only that they are made. “Making by shaping, feigning” is, after all, the etymological root of “fiction.” My point is that perceptions of beginnings and ends of any episode are matters of responsibility, not epistemology. If we take responsibility for the way we punctuate episodes, we can create opportunities for unusually productive discussions.

The study of the Flynn family reported in chapter 4 found a pattern of interaction so common that it has become a stereotype: the husband withdraws and the wife nags. Or is it that the wife nags and the husband withdraws? That’s the point: the couple (and any sentient observer) agree about the sequence of actions. They disagree about which initiates the pattern; that is, which act is “first” and which is the “response.” As a result, unproductive quarrels happen in which each asserts his or her punctuation and describes the legitimacy of his or her response: “I withdraw because you nag” or “I nag because you withdraw.” Both are right and little is gained by successive repetitions. A critical moment is achieved if the couple can call their punctuation into question, and if they can see the pattern as a whole, the logical force compelling them to do more of the same can change.

I learned this lesson in a conversation with a Laotian young man who had immigrated to the United States in the 1960s. When I asked him why he chose to leave Laos for the US, he replied, “It was my duty to kill a man.” That wasn’t quite the answer I was expecting. As he explained, his culture had a strong ethic of retribution and vengeance. If there were a murder, it was the ethical duty of the oldest male in the family of the victim to kill the murderer. Of course, the family of the man most recently killed perceived this as the murder of an innocent man who had only done his ethical duty, and this placed the burden of retribution and vengeance on the eldest male . . . and so on.² “A man from the other village,” he said, “killed my father. My father had killed his father. It was my turn and I saw the pattern going on and on, involving my son and his son and his son after him. And I said, ‘No! Enough! It ends with me!’”³

Note that the story and the sense of “oughtness” in it changes depending on what is selected as the beginning and the ending. If the episode starts with “a man from the other village killed my father,” then there is a powerful logical force to retaliate. In this context, his refusal to kill and his choice to leave the area show irresponsible cowardice. However, if the episode is perceived as starting in the unremembered past and continuing into the unforeseeable future, his actions are wise and courageous, an example for us all.

Emplotment

Punctuation defines where an episode begins and ends; between those points is a story. One of the tasks in making an episode is to convert the sequence of events into a plot; to transmute a string of sheer happenings into a meaningful narrative.

I’m borrowing the term “emplotment” from philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who makes a distinction between *cosmological* time (temporal sequence) and *phenomenological* time (time experienced as past, present, and future). These combine in *human time* through the process of emplotment, or storytelling. In Ricoeur’s view (*Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2005), narrative emplotment “configures events, agents and objects and renders those individual elements meaningful as part of a larger whole in which each takes a place in the network that constitutes the narrative’s response to why, how, who, where, when, etc.” Emplotment often involves changing the sequence of what happened first and next, selecting what to include and exclude, etc.

What is depicted as the “past” and the “present” within the plot does not necessarily correspond to the “before” and “after” of its linear, episodic structure. For example, a narrative may begin with a culminating event, or it may devote long passages to events depicted as occurring within relatively short periods of time. Dates and times can be disconnected from their denotative function; grammatical tenses can be changed, and changes in the tempo and duration of scenes create a temporality that is “lived” in the story that does not coincide with either the time of the world in which the story is read, nor the time that the unfolding events are said to depict. (*Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2005)

“What story do you have about that?” is a question often heard in the CMM tradition of practice. This question contains the embedded

suggestions that, however the other perceives a part of the social world, it is a *story*, it is *one* story, and it is *their* story. The question calls attention to the narrative emplotment done by the other.

Contextualization: the hierarchy model

We can render the social world by tearing it into stories, but this isn’t enough to clarify what episodes are being performed. Many times, there are stories within stories, or multiple stories all being enacted simultaneously. CMM’s concept of the hierarchy model provides a way of coming to grips with the fact that we never only mean one thing at a time in our actions.

The hierarchy model builds on Gregory Bateson’s (1972) idea of meta-communication. Bateson noted that communication ordinarily occurs at different levels of abstraction, such that the higher modifies the meaning of the lower. He illustrated this idea by analyzing monkeys at play in San Francisco’s Fleishhacker Zoo. Bateson described them engaged in an episode in which the actions were identical or similar to those of combat, but actually meant something other than they would if the episode were “combat.” The monkeys were whooping, beating their chests, and biting each other, but they did not respond to each other as they would if the context had been “fight.” How do monkeys (and puppies and other primates) know the difference between the speech acts of a *playful nip* and an *aggressive bite* – and know the difference *before* sensing how deeply the teeth sink into skin?

Bateson suggested that they are metacommunicating, which he defined as “exchanging signals which would carry the message, ‘this is play’” (Bateson 1972: 179). Messages about what episode we are performing – play, fights, games, debates, etc. – are not “in” the episode, but “about” the episode; they are at a different level of abstraction. Building on Bateson’s ideas, Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967) developed five “axioms” of communication, one of which states that all messages have both a content and a relationship meaning such that the relational meanings provide a context for the content.

All of this indicates that communication occurs at several levels simultaneously, and that some of these stories function as contexts for other stories. Because humans are more sophisticated than monkeys and puppies, there is more room for error in our metacommunication about what episode we are making together. At our best, we treat what others do as symbols rather than things, and symbols can be distrusted, falsified, denied,

amplified, corrected, and so on. We sometimes make our metacommunication explicit rather than depend on winks and nudges by asking "what are we making together?" and giving complete descriptions of the episodes we are creating and that we want to call into being.

I've spent more time observing puppies playing than monkeys, and it is a delight to watch them play the game that I call "you chase me and then I'll chase you." But there is a certain repetitiveness to this game. Humans create more sophisticated contexts, such as mystery, fantasy, horror, irony, and drama, in which we differentiate between what is said and what is meant on the basis of the context in which it occurs. As Bateson (1972) noted, any normally sophisticated person knows that the monster in a horror film does not denote what it seems to; that is, the film is not a scientific report that "monsters exist." Rather, the image denotes what the monster would denote *if* the monster existed.

CMM put these ideas together in the hierarchy model of meanings (Pearce, Cronen, and Conklin 1979; Pearce, Harris, and Cronen 1981). Assume a chronological sequence of speech acts. The meaning of each speech act is determined, in part, by its relationship to the speech acts that come before it and after it (that's the conversational triplet discussed in chapter 5). But the meaning of each speech act is also partly determined by the episode in which it occurs.

As shown in figure 6.1, we borrowed the symbol for a context-marker from Brown (1969/1994; further developed by Varela 1979) and used it to mean "x is in the context y." This context-marker invites you to make explicit a particular kind of distinction that we are all too familiar with, but sometimes forget to make or make only implicitly.

If we know "x," we can use this model as a heuristic, pointing us to identify the context. If "x" is Dennis's email summoning Tina to a meeting, then she needs to make some trained judgments about what is the episode of which this email is a part; then she can better judge its meaning and decide how to respond.

A city in California experienced a rapid change in its ethnic composition. Within 15 years, the percentage of Asian residents increased from less

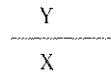


Figure 6.1 A way of representing a contextual relationship

than 15 percent to over 40 percent. Newly arrived immigrants accounted for most of the increase, and most of them were challenged to adapt to the new language and culture. The following is my transcription of an impromptu speech given toward the end of a large (about 150 persons) public meeting in which the races were proportionally represented. Although I've changed both names, the "David Lee" to whom Chang Lee referred was present in the meeting and was at the time serving as the first Asian Mayor of the city.

Yes, my name is Chang Lee. I am not David Lee's brother, OK? It just so happens to be the same last name.

I think there's a cultural gap in between, between when we're talking about the diversity here. For example, in my business, I went out door-to-door knocking a lot. I heard a lot of comments that Asian community or Asian owner doesn't participate. They are the takers. They are not the givers. And then, they don't take care of their yard. And when I went back and think about it, where I came from, Taipei, Taiwan, I mean barely you don't have a yard to take care of at all. So we have no custom, no tradition, no habit to take care of the yard. Now we end up here with a big yard and what are you going to do? If you don't do anything in summer, within two weeks, it die already. So a lot of those differences, a lot of people don't understand.

And then when I came out running for city School Board, last year, when David and I won, and the local newspaper want to have an article after they interviewed me and David, they say they would have an article wrote it in this way. Heading says, "Lee Dynasty Taking over the City!" I mean when we're accused not coming to serve, to help, to participate, and then when we come out then they will say you are taking over the city, which is not, you know, doesn't feel quite well from my feeling, so I have to protest.

And also when I started a couple of years ago when I was helping in the school with my wife. Then the other parents asked me "Why don't you help out in the PTA?" and I said, "What's the PTA?" and they say, "It's Parent Teacher Association is helping the school a lot." I went to the PTA meeting and as you men know, most PTA were attended by mothers. So when I went over there, I was one of the few fathers in there. And added up with when every organization have their ongoing business going on, and when you cut in the middle, you really got lost. Then second, when I sit in there, I heard the mother said "I move this, I move that." I was very puzzled because I thought she was sitting there, she was not moving anywhere. Why is she keep saying "I move this, I move that?" And then someone follow would

say “I second” and I was even more puzzled because I feel you don’t have to be so humble, no one claim to be the first, why you have to be second. And that’s the cultural difference.

Maybe I let you know back in the country where I came from, the government at the time wasn’t purposely try to give you the democratic because they know if they give you the democratic, the people will ask for power. So we never been trained that way. So let alone coming here, you get all this different language barrier, and all this format, all this democratic process. So I thought it was someone inside the door waving to people outside “Why don’t you come in and help?” and then the people outside couldn’t find the door. So that’s a situation we have to understand and I think the most important, we have to understand the cultural gap and also the tolerance between each other. And that’s my comment.

If you look at the content of what Chang said, it is pretty harsh. He “protests.” He describes the dominant culture as not understanding cultural differences and not acknowledging the lived experiences of people who have immigrated from other social and political systems. He accuses the city of setting the immigrants up to fail: they demand that people like him participate in local governance but then make it difficult to do so and finally find fault with them – for different reasons – whether they succeed (“you’re trying to take over”) or fail (“you take but you don’t give”).

Ouch!

You already know that the literal meaning of what Chang said may or may not resemble what he is doing and making. To understand what’s being made, you need to know to what it is a response, and what response it elicits. As it happened, Chang’s speech was frequently interrupted by laughter and followed by thunderous applause from both the Asians and Caucasians in the audience. From that, you get the idea that something special is going on. But what? One way to answer that question is to describe the episode of which it is a part. Chang’s speech was a part of a public dialogue meeting in which the community was trying to develop ways of talking productively about the issues generated by the rapid change in the ethnicity of the residents (Spano 2001). As shown in figure 6.2, a statement that might have been an “accusation” if delivered in another context was an “acceptance of an invitation” in this one.

Sometimes we know that a given action has at least two contexts, and we want to know their relative importance. That is, which is the context for what? This story appeared in the *New York Times* (Falk 2005):

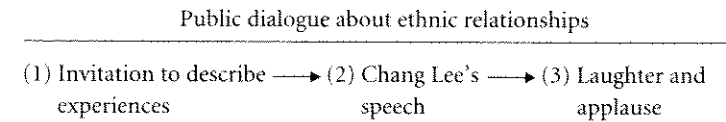


Figure 6.2 Chang Lee’s speech in context

FORBIDDEN IDEAS: With more than 100 million users, the Internet is booming in China. The American Web giants Microsoft, Yahoo and Google have all grabbed a piece of the lucrative Chinese market – but only after agreeing to help the government censor speech on the Web. In providing portals or search engines, all three companies are abiding by the government’s censorship of certain ideas and keywords, like “Tiananmen massacre,” “Taiwanese independence,” “corruption” and “democracy.” Most foreign news sites are blocked. This year, Yahoo even supplied information that helped the government track and convict a political dissident who sent an e-mail message with forbidden thoughts from a Yahoo account; he was sentenced to 10 years in jail. “Business is business,” said Jack Ma, Yahoo’s chief in China. “It’s not politics.”

On the basis of this information, we can draw some conclusions about the social world according to Mr. Ma and Yahoo, the corporation that employs him. Let’s assume that in the context of politics, Mr. Ma and Yahoo are committed to individual liberties and would not reveal personal information about a client to a hostile government. This commitment runs into the reality that, in order to do business in China, Yahoo is required to provide personal information about its users to the government. So: business or politics? Which is more important? That is, which is the “higher level” of context in the hierarchy model?

Based on what we know, it is easy to see that “business” is more important than “politics.” When the two conflict, Mr. Ma and Yahoo, apparently without suffering much regret or stress, put business first (this is depicted in figure 6.3). As Mr. Ma said clearly, “Business is business. It’s not politics.”

Even though Mr. Ma’s world sorts out easily into a stable hierarchical relationship between business and politics, there might be a tension between what Mr. Ma thinks he should do in these two realms of business

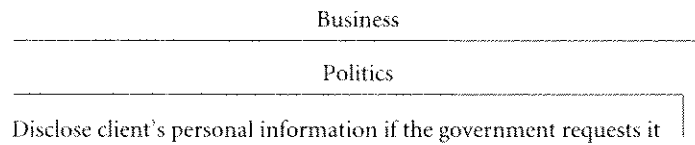


Figure 6.3 A hierarchical model of business and politics in Yahoo's China division

and politics. As long as he has a very stable hierarchy – that is, that the ordinal relationship between business and politics remains unchallenged – he can deal with this tension without uncertainty. However, we might imagine any number of things, including a conversation with a consultant or an experience in which one of his own family members was involved, that might threaten his ability to manage the relationships among levels in his hierarchy of meanings. If politics (or family or personal integrity or some other story) took over the role of the highest level of contextualization, his behavior would have to change.

Let's use the same hierarchy model to depict what is going on in another situation.

FORBIDDEN VACCINE: Every year, about 500,000 women throughout the world develop cervical cancer. In the United States alone, the disease kills about 3,700 women annually. This year, scientists developed a vaccine against human papillomavirus, a sexually transmitted disease that is the primary cause of cervical cancer. The vaccine produced 100 percent immunity in the 6,000 women who received it as part of a multinational trial. As soon as the vaccine is licensed, some health officials say, it should be administered to all girls at age 12. But the Family Research Council and other socially conservative groups vowed to fight that plan, even though it could virtually eliminate cervical cancer. Vaccinating girls against a sexually transmitted disease, they say, would reduce their incentive to abstain from premarital sex. (Falk 2005)

Using the hierarchy model, I'd describe the situation as shown in figure 6.4. Both groups, "some health officials" and "the Family Research Council," have stable hierarchies but place different stories as the most important level of context. Both are committed to preventing unnecessary deaths due to cervical cancer, but this commitment is at different levels

| | | |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| | <i>Health officials:</i> | <i>Family Research Council:</i> |
| Ideology: | Preventing unnecessary deaths from cervical cancer | Preventing immoral behavior (premarital sex) |
| Programmatic goal: | Encouraging safe sex | Preventing unnecessary deaths from cervical cancer |
| Specific policy proposals: | Vaccinate all girls at an early age; teach safe sexual practices | Preach sexual abstinence; don't vaccinate them |

Figure 6.4 Different patterns of contextualization about vaccinations

in the pattern in which they contextualize various stories. For the "health officials," it is the highest level of context; for the Family Research Council, it is secondary to "preventing immoral behavior."

In the public discourse about this topic, the two groups will clash about their specific policy proposals. In order to understand why they see each other as obstacles, we can articulate their pattern of contextualization. Noting that the two groups have different concerns as their highest level of contextualization might help us discern critical moments in the noise and clamor of conflict between these groups, but even if not, it helps us understand why they are opposed to each other in this way.

If we are sufficiently aware of our pattern of contextualization, we can better manage our meanings. Sometimes that means deliberately not responding to the content of what someone says because it is more important to maintain a particular definition of the episode. Here's an example involving mature parenting in a difficult situation. This brief, highly emotional exchange occurred between a teenaged girl who had gotten into trouble and her mother.

- (1) *Mother:* [unknown]
- (2) *Daughter:* I hope you burn in hell!
- (3) *Mother:* Listen, I've done plenty on my own to get there, but the one thing that is getting me to heaven is you. (Carpenter 2006)

The hierarchy model in figure 6.5 is one way of understanding this interaction. Mother and daughter have different concepts of what episode is the context for this conversation, "good parenting" or "getting my own

| | Mother: | Daughter: |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Definition of episode: | Good parenting | Getting my own way |
| Form of action: | Envisioning consequences; acting so as to create a long-term good relationship with daughter; accepting daughter's anger in the moment | Search for immediate gratification; little concern for long-term relationship with mother |

Figure 6.5 Differing high-level contexts in a conversation between mother and daughter

way.” Daughter’s turn (2) is clearly meant to be offensive and to end the episode. Mother’s statement in turn (3) responds in content to the second turn, but refuses to accept the implications of the statement for the change in context. To the contrary, mother’s turn (3) can be heard as a powerful, eloquent assertion that nothing that the daughter can do or say can change the highest-level context of her love and commitment to being a good mother. On one level, this denies the daughter the power to perform certain speech acts; on another, it accomplishes some quite different things.

Realizing episodes in coordinated action

Episodes are not made only by perceiving them in particular ways. They have to be realized in coordinated actions. To what extent can we call into being those episodes that are good for us; that we love or find useful? And to what extent can we act in ways that prevent realization of episodes that we hate or fear, that are dangerous, toxic, or obnoxious?

Episode-work⁴ describes what people do to make sure that the desired episode takes place. As a way of making some useful distinctions, and *not* as an attempt to provide a list of all and only ways in which this is done, I suggest three ways in which episodes develop: casting/chaos; planned; and improvised.

Realizing episodes through dramatic “casting” or chaotic emergence

Chaos theory describes complex patterns that result when a system follows relatively simple rules through many iterations. Remember the example of “boids” in chapter 3: the complex movements of a flock of birds can be

simulated if each boid follows three simple, hierarchically organized rules (Reynolds 2001).

I think some episodes develop something like the movements of flocks of birds. They are made when two or more people follow their own rules for action and these actions intermesh in ways not intended by any of the participants, who are often surprised, dismayed, or delighted by the results. This is perhaps the most capricious and unsophisticated way in which episodes can be realized. It “works” because so many of us draw from the same well of rules for meaning and action and, if I may be so bold as to suggest, because we have such low community standards of “quality control” for the episodes that we realize. There are better ways of making episodes.

Before chaos theory was developed, Vern Cronen and I used the metaphor of the theater. The idea is that we are in a play, but there is no director. Each of us knows some scripts, but not necessarily the same ones as the other actors know. Each of us wants to play certain roles, but not necessarily the complements to the roles that other people want to play. This metaphor imagines us all wandering around an immense stage, blurting out our favorite lines in the hopes that we will meet others who will take our lines as their cues and reply in a manner that “realizes” the play that we want to perform. That is, each of us has a play in mind and is looking to “cast” other people into the supporting roles (Pearce and Cronen 1980: 120–1).

Sometimes this works, I guess, but seems awfully inefficient and appears to ignore many useful critical moments. Here’s an example of what happened when an outraged youth and an unresponsive government official realized an episode by “casting” each other into their own scripts for the episodic sequence.

The young man had a grievance against the local government. He armed himself, went to the City Hall, took hostages, and threatened to kill them if the government did not comply with his demands. The local governor immediately surrounded the City Hall with armed soldiers and pledged that there would be no negotiations as long as the young man was threatening hostages. A perfect stalemate was reached when the young man said that he would not release his hostages until there had been negotiations. Neither was willing to *back down* (I italicized this phrase just to remind us that this is a speech act).

In his analysis of this situation, anthropologist Edward Hall (1977) noted that both the governor and the young man were willing to *negotiate*

(another speech act), but they had very different stories about where the speech act *negotiation* fit into the episodic sequence of resolving grievances against government. The young man actually wanted to negotiate, but he envisioned a sequence in which he took dramatic actions that showed how serious he was, elicited a response that acknowledged the depth of his emotion, and that turned into negotiation. However, the governor saw hostage-taking and occupying a government building as the last step of a desperate man who was not likely to be a responsible partner in negotiations. He envisioned a process in which the negotiation came very early in an episode and certainly before rather than after actions as provocative as hostage-taking. Because they had different ideas about the proper sequence of speech acts – specifically whether hostage-taking comes before or after negotiation – they could find no way of moving forward together without violence.

I was involved in an intercultural communication situation that began as “casting” but – fortunately – turned into something else. The episode was ultimately realized through metacommunication (see! I told you that there were more than three ways of realizing episodes!).

The Jesuit leaders of the University of Central America (UCA) were sharply divided about the civil war that had been going on in El Salvador during the 1980s. Some sided with the American-backed government; others had become open supporters of the peasants, supported by the guerrilla FMLN (*Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*). In fact, the Jesuits referred to themselves as having created two schools at the same University – they called them “UCA-one” and “UCA-two” – and, against the tradition of their Order, lived in separate residences.

Shortly before dawn on November 16, 1989, soldiers went to the house where the Jesuits supporting the peasants were sleeping and murdered all six professors, their housekeeper, and her daughter. They dragged the bodies on to the lawn and left them as a blatant statement of the fate awaiting those who opposed them.

This act of government-sponsored terrorism failed. Within hours, the nongovernmental human rights group Americas Watch brought lawyers and criminal investigators to the scene. These investigators were able to identify the perpetrators and distributed a full account both in El Salvador and in Washington, DC. Within days, other Jesuits, equally strong in their support for the poor and oppressed, had replaced those who had been murdered. These new university teachers and administrators began by introducing themselves to the military leaders who had ordered the

murder of their predecessors. One of them told me that he did this “so that, if they come for me, they’ll know who I am.” Among other consequences of these events, American support of the government diminished. In 1991, the officers involved were found guilty of murder; peace accords between the government and the FMLN were signed in 1992.

I was one of three department chairs at Loyola University Chicago sent to El Salvador to participate in the commemoration of the third anniversary of the murders and to work with our counterparts at UCA to help them recover from the effects of the war. All of us in the Loyola group appreciated the cultural differences between the United States and El Salvador and were particularly sensitive to the possibility of reproducing patterns of cultural imperialism. In a planning session before our first meeting with our Salvadoran colleagues, we reminded ourselves that the episodes for such events would be different in El Salvador than in Chicago. We knew that the Salvadoran scripts dictated that we spend the whole of the first meeting establishing relationships and enjoying each other’s company. We should have no agenda to push; the real work would come in subsequent meetings. When we arrived for our meeting, we were relaxed, prepared to enjoy good Salvadoran coffee with our new friends and to end the meeting without having had substantive discussions.

To our surprise, the Salvadorans were hardly through the door before they began to discuss specific proposals for collaboration. They had a specific agenda and were determined to get down to business.

It took only a few minutes before we all realized that both groups had had similar planning sessions in which we rehearsed the episodes that the other would expect and committed ourselves to adapt to them. As a result, the first few minutes of our meeting reproduced the common pattern of cross-cultural coordination problems, but with each of us – with the best of intentions – playing the role of the other group. When we recognized what had happened, mixed in with all the laughter and joking, we were able to negotiate a new episodic structure for our meetings that had some of the best of both cultures (for a fuller analysis of this incident, see Pearce 2004).

Realizing episodes through planning and/or rituals

Many episodes are fully planned. From a participant’s perspective, there are no hard choices or moments of uncertainty. Think of a church service or inauguration of a new CEO in which the liturgy or program is printed

and distributed. In church, people are told when to stand, kneel, or sit; when to pray and what to say when they do; and when to sing and when to listen. The only challenge for realizing such episodes is knowing what to do and organizing others to follow the script.

Other episodes are planned in general, but the participants are given some flexibility in terms of how to achieve them. Athletic events provide an example. Much of what will happen is fully specified before the game begins and referees are on hand to enforce the rules. The number of teams, number of players on the team, time allowed, and activities permitted are fully described, but teams are encouraged to invent winning strategies or perform mandated actions with uncommon skill.

More common are general agreements about the desired episode and considerable latitude about how it will be achieved. The public discourse about political issues in the United States is so polarized as I write that it resembles casting/chaos, and it isn't working well. In an attempt to show that alternative conversation forms are possible, Cal Thomas and Bob Beckel set themselves to have public, printed "civil conversations" about the hot-button items in the national newspaper *USA Today* (Common Ground n.d.). What makes this exercise interesting is that Thomas is a conservative newspaper and television commentator and Beckel is a liberal campaign strategist and that they have a long friendship despite their political differences.

Episode-work is clearly evident in their conversations. Each person works to ensure that, no matter what the other says, they co-construct an episode with the desired "civility." Sometimes this means treating fairly sharp comments as jokes rather than being offended at them; often it means admitting the limitations of one's position; and almost always it means moving to an agreement (the promised "common ground") that includes the best of the positions initially staked out by both of them.

Realizing episodes through improvisation

Improvised episodes occur when we, as participants, keep one eye on the emerging sequence of actions and the other on the episode we are making. At times, this means that we will act as others expect; at other times, we may act unexpectedly. In improvised episodes, we may start out not knowing what episode we want to enact but, at some point, work very hard to realize, or prevent the enactment of, a particular episode. We may switch between one episode and other.

CMM has developed three concepts to help understand the realization of episodes: emergent interactional logics, the serpentine model, and logical force. I think these concepts are best presented in a discussion of episodes realized through improvisation.

Emergent interactional logics: A study of "aggression rituals" described a dynamic process in which episodes seemed to develop a life of their own, evolving along paths independent of the intentions of the people involved in them. Harris, Gergen, and Lannamann (1986) wrote vignettes of an episode and showed them, one turn at a time, to a group of research participants. After each turn, the participants were asked to describe the *probability*, *desirability*, and *advisability* of what the other person should do in the next turn. These options ranged from "highly conciliatory" to "violent." After rating these possible next turns, the research participants were shown what the person in the story actually did, and the process was repeated for all subsequent turns in the story. The vignettes were written to show an interaction in which the people involved became increasingly aggressive toward each other, including – toward the end of the episode – acts of violence.

As the researchers expected, as the episode moved along through the turns, the participants described aggressive responses as more likely to occur. The surprising finding, however, was that they also described escalating hostility as more desirable and advisable. They approved and would advise actions at the end of the episode that they certainly would not have at the beginning.

This study shows the emergent logic of interaction in improvised episodes. One speech act elicits another, that one yet another, and after three or more turns, the participants in the episode are engaging in actions that no one expected. While most studies have been done of negative or conflict-filled episodes, the same dynamic can sometimes produce episodes of surprising joy and beauty. But improvisation is not limited to being pushed by preceding acts into unexpected places. As Frank Barrett (1998) has shown, there is much more to improvisation than that.

Skillful improvisation involves creativity within a structure. We learn basic patterns of episodes as part of becoming a member of a family, an organization, or a culture. Our personalities can be described as those patterns that we have taken on board from the larger array of patterns provided by our society, as well as the unique blendings and tweakings that we have put upon them.

The serpentine model: As a way of showing what this model does, let's return to the story of Tina, Dennis, and Rolf (see figure 6.6). Tina has decided that she has no choice but to attend the meeting that Dennis has announced, but she thinks she might have some options about what to do in the meeting. In one way of punctuating the episode, the first turn is Rolf's presentation at the meeting. At this moment, Tina is willing to frame the meeting as a consultation between Rolf and the division managers, but she is hoping to find a critical moment in which she can introduce her concerns about her division. As she sees it, if she is able to express her concerns, this will still be within an episode of "consultation."

Rolf doesn't see the episode beginning with his presentation at the meeting. His story is that the episode began nearly a year earlier; that the Strategic Initiative is the most important thing being done in the corporation; that he has the responsibility for making it work and if he fails, the corporation may go bankrupt; that his division, working with senior management, has done months of careful research and planning on the Strategic Initiative; and that this meeting is a courtesy to the other division managers in which he is taking time to explain to them what they will need to do to support the Strategic Initiative. He expects them to have questions about some of the controversial aspects of the plan, and is confident that he and his three assistants, who are with him in the meeting, can answer them satisfactorily by describing the research and scenario-building processes on which those decisions were based.

In what I've called turn (1) but which Rolf would see as very late in the unfolding of the episode, Rolf distributes a glossy bound document and

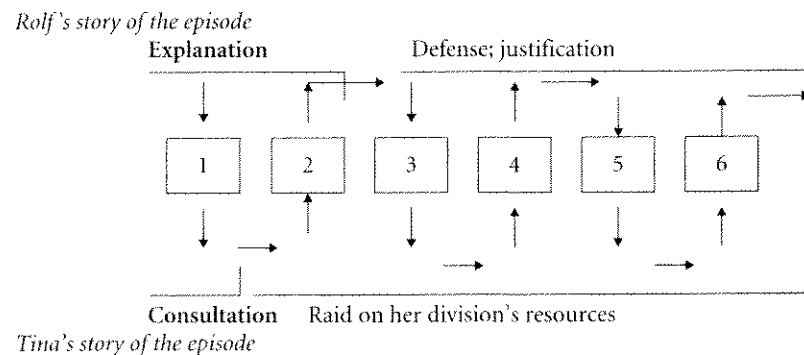


Figure 6.6 The serpentine model (partial)

uses a combination of video and PowerPoint presentation to lay out his plan for the initiative over the next five years. This turn takes about 45 minutes. The final ten minutes consists of a summary of what each of the other divisions will need to do and ends when he asks, "Are there any questions?"

Tina's division has been struggling with its assignment for the past two years. She and her management team are convinced that the diversion of corporate resources into the Strategic Initiative has crippled their ability to take the necessary steps for them to respond to changing market structures that they face. She has been frustrated because the Senior Management team has turned down her requests for additional resources, and when she has asked about the Strategic Initiative, she has been told that they are not yet ready to consult with other divisions. She is willing to participate in a consultation if it gives her a long-overdue opportunity to present the needs of her division.

But the manner as much as the content of Rolf's presentation offends her so much that she finds it impossible to sustain the framing of the episode as a "consultation." She interprets Rolf's long presentation in turn (1) as inconsistent with a consultation; she sees the plan being presented as a completed whole. She is offended by Rolf's list of things that she and the other division managers will need to do to support the plan, seeing it as his personal attempt to exercise more power than he has in the management structure. And she is enraged that, once again, she is being denied an opportunity to present her division's needs for increased resources; to the contrary, Rolf's plans require her to divert some of her already inadequate resources to support his initiative.

She feels a very strong sense that she "ought" to interrupt the corporation's implementation of this plan in order to create an opportunity for the entire management team to discuss the "costs" of the Strategic Initiative. When Rolf ends turn (1) with an invitation for other division heads to comment, she speaks up. In turn (2), she announces her decision to *refuse to comply* with Rolf's demands for her division, *insists* that the entire Strategic Initiative plan be reviewed by the division managers, and *denounces* the assumptions and decisions on which the plan is based. (I've italicized the speech acts.)

Rolf is surprised and offended by what he perceives as Tina's unwarranted *attack* on the plan. He is no longer in a mood of "consultation" but, in turn (3), he angrily *defends* the plan, citing all the research and planning that has gone into it, asking his assistants if they agree, and making clear

that the plan is based on research and scenario-building that Tina doesn't know about.

Rolf's claim, in turn (3), that she doesn't know enough about the plan to criticize it infuriates Tina. In the fourth turn, she gives a lengthy description of the many times in which she has sought information about the plan, only to be rebuffed by Dennis, who supervises them both. She characterizes the Strategic Initiative as Rolf's naked power grab with the intention of utilizing the resources of her division for his own purposes.

The episode that is being called into being is far from what either person had in mind when the meeting began. By the fifth turn in this episode, the specifics of the Strategic Initiative are irrelevant; the logical force generated by Rolf and Tina's argument is propelling the episode.

Logical force and contexts: These relationships can be depicted in the manner shown in figure 6.7, where the arrows indicate some sense of "oughtness." For convenience, we can distinguish various parts of logical force. In the second turn in any three-turn sequence, you will probably feel some force to act or not act in certain ways because of what happened in turn (1): that's *prefigurative force* (a). As you decide what to do in turn (2), you may feel that your choices are shaped by your expectations or hopes for what the other person will do in turn (3). Perhaps you'll act so that the other will respond in a certain way. That's *practical force* (b). To some extent, what you can and cannot do is guided by the episode you are enacting. Because it is the episode of, for example, asking the bank for a loan, you feel that you must tell them more about your financial circumstances than you otherwise would. This is *contextual force* (c). Finally, you may decide that you didn't want a loan after all and that you want to change the episode from "ask for a loan" to "get some financial advice." In order to change the episode from what it currently is to something else, you feel that you may refuse to give them your financial information and must do something that calls the new episode into being – for example, offering them a contract for a consultation. This is *implicative force* (d).

In the situation described above, Tina was prepared to work within an episode of interdivisional consultation. However, Rolf's glossy bound document, PowerPoint presentation and the trio of obsequious assistants had sufficient *implicative force* that it changed her definition of the episode. By changing the meaning, it created a critical incident in which she had to choose how to act. In this situation, she felt a strong *contextual force* to defend her division and resist Rolf's power-play.

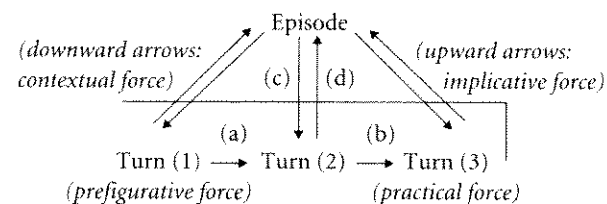


Figure 6.7 Schematic model of logical force

Rolf apparently doesn't interpret Tina's actions in turn (2) as a defense of her division. He is surprised and confronted with a bifurcation point of his own. He has to come up with a story about what's going on, and, on the basis of that story, decide what to do.

Let's assume that Rolf hesitates for just a few seconds before acting in turn (3). He is engaging in "ante-narrative," as we discussed it in chapter 5. He's interpreting what is happening, imagining several possible things he might do, and anticipating the likely consequences of each.

This is what might be going on during this moment. Rolf perceives Tina as performing a petulant attack on him personally, motivated by jealousy at his being chosen for the responsibility of the Strategic Initiative and lingering resentment because he broke off their engagement. But he realizes that if he acts out of this story, it will bring into the open a lot of things that he would prefer the other division managers not to know. So even though he thinks that this is the "real story," he chooses to act as if he interpreted her as attacking the professional competence with which he and his team have developed the Initiative, so he responds in turn (3) with a defense of the data and assumptions on which the planning was based.

Regardless of what he and Tina do, the episode that they realize in that conference room will have an afterlife that will shape the future of the company and their careers.

Patterns of Communication

Episodes cluster with others that are like them. Whatever we call it – and I favor the terms "grammar of action" or "family resemblances" suggested by Ludwig Wittgenstein (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2002) – there

is some connection that makes some episodes virtually substitutable for each other and others strikingly different experiences (Forgas 1976, 1979; Boynton and Pearce 1978). We are only now developing a language that names and makes useful discriminations among episodes that share common characteristics. Some of the names in play among the people with whom I work include dialogue, deliberation, discussion, debate, negotiation, mediation, argument, control-and-report, decide-advocate-defend, public education, seminar, lecture-discussion, and collaboration. I wonder if you share my observation that, when it comes to episodes, like attracts like. That is, you are far more likely to find a second dialogic episode in a family or organization in which you've already found the first one; one argument seems to lead to another; and those who give commands also take them.

Let "patterns of communication" be a general category name for clusters of episodes that have a strong family resemblance. How many patterns of communication are there? I think they are like speech acts in that there can be an infinite number. But, unlike speech acts, I think patterns of communication are emergent functions that, once developed, maintain their boundaries and resist change by actively attracting episodes that share their central characteristics and repelling those that differ or would change them. I'm speaking from the center of my belief but beyond the limits of my data here, so let me share some learnings as support even if I don't have proof.

I spent some time working with a marriage counselor who told me that he was particularly attentive to his clients' use of the words "always" and "never." In the early stages of a relationship, he explained, every moment is new and fresh, and we remember them all. However, after a while, there are so many experiences that we have to "chunk" them, so we emplot them as what the other "always" or "never" does. While this may be cognitively efficient, it also makes it less likely that we will notice when the other does something that they "never" do, so we begin to reinforce our perceptions. And since we act out of our beliefs, we then act in ways that invite the other to respond as we expect, and when they do . . . well, you see the self-confirming and socially-constructing cycle that emerges. Assume that this cycle has dominated a couple's life for many years, but has brought them to a point of unhappiness such that they seek counseling. My friend told me that he observes what hard work it is for these couples to undo the form of communication that has emerged and to replace it with another. This form of communication comprises the family culture.

Once formed, forms of communication invite others like them and resist those that differ from them. As I write, the form of communication in the Federal Government of my country is so polarized that it is difficult to deal with any issue on its merits. One recent example was the nomination of Samuel A. Alito, Jr., to be a member of the Supreme Court. Even those who seemed to be commenting on his qualifications were clearly pushing partisan agendas. I watched this process very carefully to see if anyone would attempt to engage in genuine deliberation about his qualifications, and if so, whether that attempt would be transformed by the form of communication so that it would become just another way of doing the same thing. I didn't find any evidence of effective attempts to go against the grain of the dominant form of communication: what might have been an array of good reasons to support or oppose his nomination was replaced by lists of financial and political forces lined up to support or oppose him. These are quite different forms of communication.

Forms of communication are not neutral; they enable and impede what happens in them. I've argued that there is a direct, reciprocal causal relationship between forms of communication and (the equally abstract concept) ways of being human (Pearce 1989). One way of naming forms of communication uses the terms *monocultural*, *ethnocentric* (and its modern variant, *neo-traditional*), *modernistic*, and *cosmopolitan*.

Organizational ethicist Marvin Brown (2005: ch. 2) used these forms in his analysis of corporate integrity. I'm going to draw on his striking image of a trade show, where various companies are presenting themselves and their products. The conference hall has four exhibits, each from a different company.

Exhibit A contains a storyboard describing the company; all of the exhibitors are wearing identical company sweaters and are talking to each other.

Exhibit B also has a storyboard describing the sponsoring company and its growth, but this storyboard also includes the story of its competitors. Charts and graphs show that the competitors are inferior companies. Visitors to this booth are welcomed with a guide, showing them exactly how they are to move through it; there seems to be one, right way to do things. The last station on the tour involves a survey, and all of the questions have a "right or wrong" flavor to them.

Exhibit C is filled with the latest gadgets. In fact, we see the original display being taken down and replaced with one even more colorful and with

more recent information than the one that was erected only a few hours ago. Everyone seems too busy to welcome visitors to the exhibit and some are engaged in a heated debate about the merits of the new product line. However, there is an interactive computer-projected display on the wall – whups, it was just revised by one of the exhibitors, working on her laptop.

Exhibit D seems at first much more disorderly than the others. There are lots of charts, pamphlets, books, CDs scattered about, and visitors are invited to leaf through them and read or watch what they like. The centerpiece of the display is a circle of chairs in which a number of people are engaged in earnest conversation. It's hard to tell the exhibitors from the visitors, except that the hosts make sure that there is at least one empty chair in the circle, which functions as an invitation to others to join the conversation.

According to Brown, Exhibit A displays monocultural communication; Exhibit B ethnocentric; Exhibit C modernistic; and Exhibit D cosmopolitan communication. Clearly, your experience as a visitor is different in each of these forms of communication. Each structures a social world that has distinctive features and these features make some ways of being and some episodic patterns difficult and others easy. One of the most striking differences among these forms of communication is the way they deal with differences.

Every once in a while – often while watching the antics of actors on televised commercials – my wife and I look at each other and say “we must be aliens.” We feel that we have different motivations and different expectations of how to act than the simplistic portrayals of people in this thin slice of popular culture. And we suspect that everyone in contemporary society feels “different” from some of the others.

As a pattern of communication, monocultural communication makes it difficult to perceive or acknowledge differences. Everyone else “should” be a “native” in our culture; they should perceive things in the same way, like the same things, and know the same things. Actions outside the normal pattern are often simply not noticed.

Ethnocentric patterns of communication, on the other hand, are very sensitive to differences. They tend to structure the social world in sharp dichotomies: “us” vs. “them”; “right” vs. “wrong”; and “good” vs. “evil.” If you are part of “us,” you are expected to agree and conform; if you don't, you are likely to be perceived as part of “them,” and “they” are almost always worse than “us.”

Modernistic communication celebrates difference – for a while. Like a consumer alert for the new fashion, those engaging in this form of communication quickly tire of new things and look for things even newer. They see disagreements as problems to be solved so that we can “progress.” People are seen as virtuous if they “make a difference” or “make things happen,” and objects and people are evaluated in terms of where they stand in relation to progress.

Cosmopolitan communication patterns see differences as normal and as sites for exploration. In this form of communication, one would not expect or want to “resolve” differences. Instead, the challenge is to find ways of coordinating with each other in a social world that has in it many different social worlds, and in which people not only are different, but should be different.

This way of naming different forms of communication is useful for some purposes, but surely not for others, and I'm very interested to know how others would sort them out.

The preceding sentence was, of course, appropriate for cosmopolitan communication; it would seem silly or perhaps even evil from the perspective of other forms of communication. And that's the point. These forms of communication are not benign; they are integrally related to the forms of consciousness and relational minds discussed in the following chapters.

Personally, I believe that the world is far too complex and dangerous for us to adopt a laissez-faire approach to forms of communication. The issues confronting us – as individuals, as families, as nations, as a civilization – are too important to stuff them into inadequate forms of communication. My own professional practice as a consultant and facilitator attempts to spur the evolution of forms of communication toward what I'm here calling cosmopolitan communication and sometimes call dialogic communication. As a cosmopolitan communicator, I acknowledge that this choice is not the one that everyone would make, and I seek to coordinate my actions with those who disagree rather than trying to persuade or coerce them into agreeing with me.

But I'm delighted that more and more people seem to be reaching the conclusion that it is useful to distinguish among forms of communication and that these forms are consequential. In my view, learning how to do episode-work is the first step in being able to call into being preferred forms of communication, and being able to call into being preferred forms of communication is a key step in making better social worlds.

Making Better Social Worlds

I believe that the material in his chapter can be used in many ways to help us discern critical moments and to act wisely in them. Let me bring this discussion of episodes and forms of communication to an end by pointing out just two ways of making better social worlds using some of the concepts and models presented in this chapter.

Freeing us up so that we can make wiser choices

The same “glue” that holds episodes together – logical force – limits and shapes what we can do at specific moments during the episode. That is, if I am in an argument, I feel that I have to contradict what you’ve just said, or if I’m in a negotiation, I feel that there are options on the table that I have to reject or accept. My feeling of oughtness, as studies of family violence have shown, may be so powerful that I may do things that I would never do in other circumstances, or I may deliberately do something (because a person like me in a situation like this *must!*) that is clearly not in my own best interest.

Our social worlds are filled with conditions and patterns of interaction that no one would freely choose. I’m thinking of the desperate poverty in urban slums; the lack of resources in remote villages; and the fear and violence of prolonged war or from state-sponsored terrorism. I believe that these conditions are made, and they persist because those who make them feel that they must act in the way that they do. That is, my chosen hypothesis is that all of us, even those involved in making horrible conditions, are doing what we think we should or must.

This hypothesis implies that it doesn’t help us to think of people who do bad things as bad people, or to attempt to correct intolerable conditions by removing the people responsible. A more effective way – if we can forgo our thirst to administer punishment – is to change the logical force that makes them think that they must do what they do. That is, if we think of people as players in the various social games that make up our society, we would do better to change the games so that they have to play by different rules rather than convince them to not to play or to play in such a way that they lose. So how can we change the games or, less metaphorically, free us all from the logical force that compels us to act in ways that have undesirable outcomes?

There are many ways, of course. The one I’ll talk about here is a procedure that consultants use in working with clients. For purposes of illustration, let’s pick up the story of Tina, Rolf, and Dennis. After the meeting, Rolf goes back to his office, frustrated and angry at what happened. He’s not sure what to do, so he calls Ingrid, an internal consultant with the company, and asks her to meet with him.

Ingrid’s practice is based on CMM. Her first assumption is that Rolf’s social world is organized in such a way that he is experiencing it as a problem. Perhaps he feels blocked; perhaps he feels that he’s caught up in an ongoing social pattern that he doesn’t like or that has undesirable consequences; perhaps he feels that he’s being called upon to play a role he doesn’t like. She deliberately takes a position of not knowing what is going on or what Rolf should do. Acting out of that position, she can invite Rolf to become aware of and take appropriate responsibility for the way he’s emplotted the episodes of which he is a part. We might call her strategy “de-emplotted” leading to “re-authoring” the story of what is going on. During this process, Ingrid believes, Rolf will identify critical moments that will provide him the opportunity to make a different social world.

Ingrid asks Rolf to meet her in a conference room equipped with a whiteboard and markers. She asks him to start at the beginning and tell her what happened that made him decide that a consultation might be helpful. As he tells the story, she constructs the time-line that is the heart of the serpentine model, first starting with a turn-by-turn sequence of what happened. She helps him tell the story by gently directing his attention away from his interpretations and toward a more objective description of what people actually said and did. She reinforces the notion of sequence – what came before and after other things. Her part of the conversation consists of statements like “and then what happened?” and “you’ve told me that this . . . and then this . . . did something happen between?” She offers him the marking pen and invites him to help her plot out the story in the chronological sequence in which it occurred. She knows, from her own experience and that of others in this tradition of practice, that Rolf’s first telling of the story will leave out many turns and reverse the sequence of many turns. By using the time-line, she has already performed an intervention that causes him to become aware of that part of the way he’s emplotted the story. She also inquires about his punctuation. “Is this where you think the story begins?” she asks.

When she and Rolf think they have described the sequence of events well enough, Ingrid begins working with the hierarchy model. With “speech acts”

in mind, she asks Rolf to name what was “done” in each turn, knowing that each name that he gives embeds a larger story. She listens carefully while they move through the sequence of turns in the episode, and picks what seems to her one or more turns that might well have been critical moments. She asks Rolf to elaborate on the stories that are embedded in those turns, perhaps prompting him to differentiate among stories about what is going on (episode), about the people involved, and about the relationships among them. She treats these stories as contexts for the actions.

She asks Rolf to articulate the stories embedded in the actions taken by other people in the episode as well as by himself. She doesn’t expect him to give very elaborate or rational stories about other people’s motivations at first. Rather, she expects him to say that they are “just dumb” or “evil” or perhaps he will even say that he can’t imagine what story they would tell. As the consultation goes on, however, she listens carefully to see when his stories about the other people become richer, more human and less dismissive. This is a sign that the logical force that has had him in its grasp is loosening.

To change the story (and the serpentine model they are jointly drawing on the board) from a flat plane to a three-dimensional model, Ingrid invites Rolf to explore the logical force that various people were feeling at specific turns. She doesn’t use the term “logical force” of course (unless she knows that Rolf has been in a CMM training session, which makes all of this work much easier!), but she differentiates between feeling that one has to do something “because of” what has already happened (prefigurative and contextual force) and what one has to do “in order to” bring something else about (practical and implicative force). She brings some colored marking pens to indicate the difference, making lighter or darker marks to indicate the strength of the logical force.

When she thinks that Rolf has de-emplotted the episode sufficiently to be able to re-author it, she goes back to the turn(s) that she thinks were the most significant critical moments. “What other things might you (or he or she) have done in this turn?” she asks. She encourages Rolf to be creative and playful, imagining a slightly wider range of possibilities than are likely. Then she asks what story would be embedded in these hypothetical alternative actions. Her purpose is to create a rich range and variety of stories; their content is less important than the activity of developing multiple stories.

At this point, Rolf might start offering revised stories about what happened in the meeting. Ingrid listens politely as he does, but keeps their

conversation moving on. When she thinks that Rolf is ready, she invites him to look at the whole serpentine model and comment on it. She might direct his attention to the context markers that show when the episode changed from one thing to another; or to the pattern of logical force.

At this point, Ingrid can make choices about how to continue the conversation with Rolf, but notice that what she’s done has been to ask questions that invite him to think about the situation and the patterns of communication in it. She has deliberately avoided anything like “instructing” him or “persuading” him what to do. Using the concepts and tools of CMM, she’s enriched his understanding of the episode that he found problematic and she’s worked to prevent him from re-authoring his story prematurely. As a result, Rolf is in a position to choose more wisely how to act into the critical moments that will occur “next” in this situation.

Calling better patterns of communication into being

In the description of Ingrid’s work with Rolf, I said that this work is made easier if the client knows the concepts and tools of CMM. I think that’s true, and that it has two important implications. First, the consultant can and should be totally transparent. There is nothing sneaky about this way of working, and its effect does not depend on doing something out of the awareness of the client. Among other things, that makes life easier for consultants. Second, clients can learn and internalize these concepts and tools, becoming able to use them with less or no help from a consultant. In fact, with some practice, at least some clients will learn to use these tools just-in-time, during the problematic episode, acting wisely into the situation as it develops.

So what happens if many clients learn these tools and use them, just-in-time, in many of the difficult situations in which they find themselves? My joking answer is that consultants will work themselves out of their jobs! It’s a joke, because the need is sufficiently great and the learning curve sufficiently slow that we have a good bit of job security. My real answer is that we will start having a greater ratio of better episodes in our social worlds and better forms of communication will emerge. And that’s a very good thing.

I believe that practitioners, in their knowledge of how to plan and facilitate meetings and conferences, are far ahead of scholars in their ability to describe and explain what is happening in these more productive

and pleasant meetings and conferences. For example, we know that a potentially conflicted episode works better if people discuss their interests before announcing their positions, and that this episodic pattern can occur at the family dinner table, in the corporate boardroom, and in international trade or military negotiations (Spangler 2003). And we know that there is a reciprocal causal relationship between the kinds of communication that occur and the kinds of skills that people develop (Siegel 1999). So we can imagine a spiral in which more and more people are invited into better forms of communication and learn the skills needed for this kind of communication, so they create those forms of communication and invite others into them . . . and so it goes until what I've called "cosmopolitan communication" (others might call it something else, and that's OK) breaks out.

Collectively, we now know a good deal about how to initiate that upward spiral. Here's an example. On September 11, 2001, Reima was part of a surgical team performing an operation in the hospital where she worked. When she left the operating room, someone told her that airplanes had crashed into the World Trade Center in New York. Horrified, she joined other doctors and nurses in the staff lounge to watch the televised news coverage. Some time later, she described her experience this way:

it is a very big room . . . and it was full of people. And they were showing the Towers coming down and all the people and the confusion and commotion, and for a second . . . everyone turned around and looked at me as though it was my fault. And standing there in that room . . . and these are the people I had worked with for over 20 years . . . I was actually for a moment, and I hate to use this word, I was actually scared . . . I was actually afraid of being there at that moment. . . . Because I could almost feel the hostility . . . And then you know it was either my imagination or it was true . . . I'm not sure but I don't think I could have imagined it all. (Wasserman 2004: 88)

Reima is a Muslim, and wears the distinctive headdress of her Pakistani heritage.

There are some forms of communication in which Reima would not feel comfortable telling this story, and some in which telling it would be perceived as the speech act *accusation*. But Reima joined an interfaith (Muslim, Christian, and Jewish) dialogue group that was dedicated to create – at least among themselves – a different form of communication

at a time when the public discourse among these faiths was anything but dialogic.

In fact, Reima told the story in this group twice. Organizational consultant Ilene Wasserman asked the group to allow her to study their attempts to achieve dialogue. One of her findings was that "[r]eflection was a catalyst for storying and restorying dialogic moments" (Wasserman 2004: 160).

When I asked people to tell me about a dialogic moment in the first individual interview, their first response was: "I don't think there has been one." Within seconds, they began to tell me a story. The very invitation to reflect on dialogic moments called forth a dialogic moment. A dialogic moment was not experienced as such until I asked the question. The question I asked, as well as the contexts in which it was asked, provided the logical force to construct, both individually and collectively, the dialogic moment. (Wasserman 2004: 161)

Having observed and interviewed the group, Ilene selected specific moments for the group to reflect upon. One of these was Reima's story, which she told again. Telling it in this context created an opportunity for an unusual and unusually profound experience of "meeting" among the people present which fit the description of dialogic moments:

It is the experience of inventive surprise shared by the dialogic partners as each turns toward the other and both mutually perceive the impact of each other's turning. It is a brief interlude of focused awareness and acceptance of otherness and difference that somehow simultaneously transcends the perception of difference itself. (Cissna and Anderson 2002: 186)

The form of communication in this interfaith group encouraged dialogue and created spaces for the members of the group to explore themselves and their relationships with each other in a way strikingly different from the "normal" pattern of communication in the United States during this time. What would it be like if we woke each morning with the calm certainty that this form of communication was normal in our workplace? Would corporate or political decisions be wiser or less wise if those who made them engaged in cosmopolitan communication? If cosmopolitan communication (by whatever name) were normal in bars, on street corners, in schools, and in workplaces, what difference would it make as we read the newspapers each morning?

Notes

- 1 Technically, to say that "I will begin here, although there is no 'real' beginning" is part of the rhetorical genre of *aporia*. In this form of rhetoric, the speaker dwells on unanswered questions. In its trivial use, it is a way for a speaker to feign ignorance and seek to cajole the audience into "discovering" for themselves what the speaker wants them to believe. In its more serious sense, and the sense in which I suggest its use here, it is a way of clearly signaling the unfinishedness of the thing described, the incompleteness of the description, and the commitment of the speaker to remember that, when all that can be said and done has been, there is still much more to say and do. At least, that's *one* story about *aporia*.
- 2 This reminds me of the endless pattern of circle-square-circle-square in which we were trapped in the simulation in the chapter on coordination.
- 3 I don't know this young man's tribal identity and cannot attest to the accuracy of his description of his cultural norms. This was the story he told.
- 4 I'm patterning the term "episode-work" on Freud's (1990) "joke-work," which in turn was based on his notion of "dream-work." In each instance, it is the "work" that we do to make an episode, joke, or dream. However, I am not drawing further parallels between CMM and psychoanalysis.

References

- Barrett, F. J. (1998), Creativity and improvisation in jazz and organizations: implications for organizational learning, *Organization Science*, 9: 605–22.
- Bateson, G. (1972), A theory of play and fantasy. In *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, New York: Ballantine, pp. 177–93.
- Berger, P. L. and Luckmann, T. (1966), *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge*, Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Boynton, K. R. and Pearce, W. B. (1978), Personal transitions and interpersonal communication: a study of navy wives. In E. Hunter and S. Nice (eds.), *Military Families: Adaptation to Change*, New York: Praeger, pp. 130–41.
- Brown, G. S. (1969/1994), *Laws of Form*, Portland, OR: Cognizer Press.
- Brown, M. T. (2005), *Corporate Integrity: Rethinking Organizational Ethics and Leadership*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carpenter, H. (2006), Reconceptualizing communication competence: high performing coordinated communication competence. PhD dissertation, Fielding Graduate University, Santa Barbara, CA.
- Cissna, K. and Anderson, M. R. (2002), *Moments of Meeting: Buber, Rogers, and the Potential for Public Dialogue*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Common Ground: Bridging the Partisan Divide in Washington (n.d.), retrieved from <http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/common-ground-index.htm> on September 6, 2006.
- Cronen, V. E. (1998), Communication theory for the twenty-first century: cleaning up the wreckage of the psychology project. In J. S. Trent (ed.), *Communication: Views from the Helm for the 21st Century*, Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, pp. 18–38.
- Falk, W. (2005), While you were sleeping, *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/30/opinion/30falk.html?th&emc=th> on December 20, 2005.
- Forgas, J. P. (1976), The perception of social episodes: categorical and dimensional representations in two different social milieus, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34: 199–209.
- Forgas, J. P. (1979), *Social Episodes: The Study of Interaction Routines*, New York: Academic Press.
- Freud, S. (1990), *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, New York: W. W. Norton.
- Goffman, E. (1974), *Frame Analysis*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gumperz, J. J. (1975), Introduction. In P. Cole and J. L. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics*. Vol. 3: *Speech Acts*, New York: Academic Press.
- Hall, E. J. (1977), *Beyond Culture*, Garden City, NY: Anchor Press.
- Harré, R. and Secord, P. (1973), *The Explanation of Social Behaviour*, Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams.
- Harris, L. M., Gergen, K. J., and Lannamann, J. W. (1986), Aggression rituals, *Communication Monographs*, 53: 252–65.
- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2005), Paul Ricoeur: Time and Narrative. Retrieved from <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/r/ricoeur.htm#H5> on October 29, 2005.
- Pearce, W. B. (1989), *Communication and the Human Condition*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Pearce, W. B. (2004), The coordinated management of meaning. In W. B. Gudykunst (ed.), *Theorizing about Intercultural Communication*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 35–54.
- Pearce, W. B. and Cronen, V. E. (1980), *Communication, Action and Meaning: The Creation of Social Realities*, New York: Praeger.
- Pearce, W. B., Cronen, V. E., and Conklin, R. F. (1979), On what to look at when studying communication: a hierarchical model of actors' meanings, *Communication*, 4: 195–220.
- Pearce, W. B., Harris, L. M., and Cronen, V. E. (1981), The coordinated management of meaning: human communication in a new key. In C. Wilder-Mottand and J. Weakland (eds.), *Rigor and Imagination: Essays in Communication from the Interactional View*, New York: Praeger, pp. 149–94.

- Reynolds, C. (2001), Boids: background and update. Retrieved from <http://www.red3d.com/cwr/boids/> on December 31, 2005.
- Siegel, D. J. (1999), *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, New York: Guilford Press.
- Spangler, B. (2003), Integrative or interest-based bargaining. In G. Burgess and H. Burgess (eds.), *Beyond Intractability*, Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Retrieved from http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/interest-based_bargaining/ on September 6, 2006.
- Spano, S. (2001), *Public Dialogue and Participatory Democracy: The Cupertino Community Project*, Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2002), Ludwig Wittgenstein. Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein/#Lan> on January 27, 2006.
- Varela, F. J. (1979), *Principles of Biological Autonomy*, New York: Elsevier.
- Wasserman, I. (2004), Discursive processes that foster dialogic moments: transformation in the engagement of social identity group differences in dialogue. PhD dissertation, Fielding Graduate University, Santa Barbara, CA.
- Watzlawick, P., Beavin, J., and Jackson, D. D. (1967), *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes*, New York: W. W. Norton.

**THE TAVISTOCK AND PORTMAN
NHS FOUNDATION TRUST LIBRARY
120 BELSIZE LANE
LONDON, NW3 5BA
020 8938 2520**