

Interactional Dynamics and Social Change: Planning as Morphogenesis

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Rick A.M. Iedema

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Abstract

This thesis looks at social interaction from the point of view of social-institutional process. In doing so, it aims to account for i) how broader institutional processes are instantiated in local interaction, and ii) how western technologisation (in the Foucaultian sense) relates to or is instantiated in local interaction.

This thesis makes the claim that the overall drift of the bureaucratic process is to 'con-textualise' or to naturalise that which has been or needs to be seen to be agreed on, and which can thus be placed beyond negotiation. Thus, this process is, first, a device aimed at managing meaning (with a view to containing and controlling non-meaning or 'noise'), and second, a process aimed at re-semiotising (new integrations of) meaning with a view to prevent its (re)negotiation.

The description is modelled, first, on the recontextualisation inherent in grammatical metaphor (Halliday 1985/94: §10). The description of recontextualisation is extended beyond language to include extra-linguistic recontextualisations or 're-semiotisations' (cf. 'inter-semioticity'; Jakobson 1971a). Second, the description is modelled on the coding-identifying process used (by Halliday and Davidse) to typify the grammar. This process sets up a relation of identity between a 'token' and a betokened or 'value', and that relation is seen as obtaining between the various stages of the planning project studied, leading from somatic to extra-somatic realisations. Each of the 'identifications' requires hegemonic 'work' for their social validation.

'Work' manifests itself as 'r e d u n d a n c y', or as the relatively predictable association of actions and meanings. For such 'work' to retain its relevance, it needs to remain sensitive to alternative associations of meanings and actions ('symmetry breakings'). While a lack of sensitivity may result in entropy, sensitivity to new meanings will manifest itself as 'm o r p h o g e n e s i s', or 'the elaboration of new structures' (Wilden 1980: 140). Morphogenesis is shown to take place linguistically, as grammatical metaphor, as well as extra-linguistically, as re-semiotisation.

This thesis also addresses another kind of change: 's c h i s m o - g e n e s i s'. This is the progressive amplification of contradiction and opposition, and, rather than achieving consensual and abstract meta-meaning ('de-differentiation') as in the case of morphogenesis, it spirals into a proliferation of incompatible meaning makings ('differentiation').