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Co-Constitution, Causality, and Confluence: Organizing in a World without Entities

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Abstract and Keywords

The shift in focus from entities to process in organizational theory is both theoretically challenging and rich in potential. In this chapter I first consider two major challenges to the traditional science of organizations, including a shift from research devoted to establishing empirically based covering laws to a science invested in generating futures through participatory practices. I then consider a theoretical orientation to process, one that illuminates the collaborative or co-active constitution of what we take to be entities, and the ongoing process required to sustain a world of independent events or actions. Finally, with this emphasis on co-active process in place, I take up the possibility of understanding organizational activity in terms of confluence theory. The latter emphasizes wholistic collations of co-constituting “entities” that are in motion across time. Such an orientation to understanding invites the scholar to engage in future building activities that are sensitized to the protean potentials for organizational re-constitution.

Keywords: relational theory, confluence, process theory, co-action

By cosmic rule, as day yields night, so winter becomes summer, war becomes peace, and plenty gives way to famine. Fire penetrates the lump of myrrh, until the fire and myrrh die away, but to rise again in the smoke called incense.

Heraclitus

It is noteworthy that we generally recognize only a handful of philosophers—Heraclitus, Bergson, and Whitehead among them—whose writings privilege **(p. 56)** ongoing process over stable substances or structure. Perhaps this should not be surprising. The major concerns of Western philosophy have long been toward establishing durable foundations—for knowledge, morality, political practices, aesthetics, and so on. In a world of process, however, there is little reason to seek enduring foundations. Indeed, it is difficult to identify the kinds of substantial entities the understanding of which would require foundations. The search for knowledge requires an object of study.

Organizational science is largely a benefactor of the tradition of substances. That is, it was born in the wake of a philosophy seeking foundations for knowledge of an enduring subject matter. In effect, one may trace the beginnings of organizational science to the twentieth-century philosophy of science, and its attempt to generate viable foundations for empirical research. The longstanding belief that sustained research will lead to increments in knowledge of the organization, and that deductions from such knowledge will favor a progressive flourishing of organizational efficacy, has been a touchstone of the discipline. Thus, in entertaining the possibility of an alternative metaphysics—one that replaces the assumption of enduring entities with a vision of continuous process—we find ourselves crossing a threshold into largely unexplored territory. If process is in the forefront, how might we envision our subject matter, the process of inquiry, and the possible implications for world practices?

These are complex issues, pregnant with possibility, and the dialogues now exploring the potentials for a process orientation to organizational study are much to be welcomed. In the present chapter, I wish to offer three inter-related entries into this dialogue. First, I will take up the more general question of what might follow if a process perspective were to be embraced by organizational science. How radical are these departures; what promise do they hold? With these preliminary remarks in hand, I will outline a process-oriented departure that has, for me, opened up a new and exciting range of inquiry. My starting point in this case will be a concern with the relational generation of meaning. Finally, I will briefly sketch an alternative to traditional causal explanation in organizational science. The focus here will be on relational confluence.

4.1 An organizational science without organizations?

The word, organization, is a noun and it is also a myth. If one looks for an organization one will not find it. What we will find is that there are events, linked together, that will transpire within concrete walls, **(p.57)** and these sequences, their pathways, their timing, are the forms we erroneously make into substances when we talk about organizations.

Karl Weick

The presumption of enduring entities is pivotal to the traditional science of organizations. Without presuming the substantive existence of “the organization,” there would be little in the way of a science. How is it possible to embrace a process orientation and sustain any form of science as we know it? In my view, a fully developed process orientation would indeed require alterations in our traditional view of behavioral science. Many of these would be radical departures. However, science is not itself a stable institution, and its beliefs and practices have not only changed over the centuries, but in markedly different directions depending on the discipline. In this sense, one might well see the shift in physics from a Newtonian to a quantum paradigm as illustrating the potentials inherent in moving from an entity to a process based cosmology. In effect, as we shift assumptions so do we stand to open up new theoretical, methodological, and practical avenues of scientific activity. At the same time, major shifts in orientation such as this are not easily achieved. What are required are the difficult tasks of self-reflexive critique, imagining alternatives, and working through the potentials and shortcomings of various practices. In what follows, I briefly center on three areas of potential transformation, and their implications:

4.2 The challenge of pure process

If we replace entities as the focus of concern with process, we are sensitized at the outset to cross-time configurations. It is not the metaphors of the organization as a pyramid or a machine that are compelling, for example, so much as metaphors of turbulent streams or conversational flows. Put in these terms, however, we can distinguish differences along a dimension varying from conservative to more radical images of process. More conservative orientations have been present since the inception of the discipline. We have long theorized, for example, that organizational functioning depends on a set of continuous bi-causal relations among various organizational entities (e.g. groups or individuals). Most systems theories embody such a view. And organizational development has long been viewed as movement from an existing (and less than optimal) condition to a more favorable one. However, such accounts are conservative in **(p.58)** their dependence on conceptions of bounded and stable states or entities. In the case of systems formulations, for instance, one typically posits entities or states which interact, and in most organizational development sequences one moves from one bounded and identifiable state to another.

Karl Weick was perhaps among the first to propose a more radical form of process theory (Weick, 1995). His study of the Mann Gulch disaster (Weick, 1993) provides an excellent illustration of how understanding expands when we broaden our vision of process. In this study of the communication among fire-fighters under rapidly changing and life-threatening conditions, almost none of the elements remains wholly stable. The fire is in continuous motion, as well as the condition of the fire-fighters, their communication, and their equipment. Although the cross-time transformations are less rapid, much the same could be

said of other, more recent process-sensitive studies. This would include inquiry into organizational discourse, conversational processes, ethnomethods, dramaturgical scenarios, rituals, and so on.

However, while extending the relational emphasis in significant ways, we also begin to approach a ceiling. At the most basic level, the units making up the sequences tend to remain inviolate. The individual actors in such accounts, for example, continue to be treated as separate or indivisible units. In this sense, whatever we view as process remains as a relationship among the independent units. In more radical form, a process orientation would challenge the very conception of boundaries. If there is continuous change, there is no indivisible “thing” to be identified. Consider, for example, in the Mann Gulch study, one might say that the fire and dry grass formed an inseparably changing agglomeration. In the process individual identities were lost. In effect, one shifts focus from things in themselves to what might be viewed as a relational forming.

At this point, however, we begin to confront the limits of scholarly expression. As scholars we rely primarily on traditions of linguistic representation. However, a language of nouns and pronouns essentially presumes a world constituted by discrete entities. To employ the language is to construct just such a world. At the same time, such a vehicle of representation cannot easily be used to describe processes in continuous motion. One may articulate particular states or stages, but not the process in motion. A space is opened now for new and innovative orientations to theoretical intelligibility. Two such possibilities will be introduced later in this chapter.

(p.59) 4.3 From observation to participation

In a science committed to independent entities, there is reason to maintain a clear separation between the observer and the object of observation. Objective knowledge depends on the capacity of the observer to report on the state or condition of the observed. However, as we approach the possibility of pure process, it becomes increasingly difficult to specify the boundaries separating such entities. Under these conditions the traditional view of an observational science breaks down. The border between subject and object is blurred. Preparation for such a conclusion is already extant in various corners of the social sciences. From Kuhn's (1962) classic work to contemporary inquiry in the social studies of science, it is commonly understood that the scientific observer does not function independently from the assumptions and values shared within his or her community of peers. In this sense there is no “independent” observation. Observation is always situated within a context of relationship. In effect, the independent observer melts away into communal process. At the same time, if the putative object of science is a communal construction—born of the shared paradigms or traditions of the group—then neither is there an

independent object. Both subject and object become outcomes of a more basic communal process.

From a process perspective, then, we are invited to consider alternatives to the view of the scientist as an observer of an independent world. Following the above line of reasoning, at least one promising possibility is to view the organizational scientist as participating within the broader processes making up cultural life. To engage in research is a form of cultural participation. From the selection of research methods, to the concepts employed in research, and the resulting interpretations, the scientist is effectively “making culture.” We swim in the river of relationship, and we cannot avoid making waves. At this point, one may appropriately inquire into the forms of cultural life that are sustained or created by various research activities. Such questions are inevitably moral and political in implication, as critical organizational scholars have properly explicated. This point is closely tied to the next.

4.4 From covering laws to co-creating futures

If one presumes a world constituted by stable entities, one can envision a science dedicated to the progressive illumination of a subject matter. In **(p.60)** traditional terms, continuing research enables the scientist to become increasingly accurate in making predictions concerning the nature and activity of such entities. On this account, the ideal result is a set of covering laws, that is, general laws that allow precise prediction of the phenomenon under various conditions. However, in a world of inherent process, this view of a progressive science is limited. Indeed, one may view human activity as infinitely protean. And given the participation of science within the cultural flow, scientific descriptions and explanations ineluctably alter the character of social life. For example, research based on the presumption of the machine-like functioning of the organization may contribute to forms of organizational life that come to resemble a machine. In effect, social science knowledge is not cumulative in the sense of enabling the increased prediction and control of human behavior. It is essentially an agent of cultural change.

A promising alternative to the traditional aim of producing covering laws follows from the above vision of the scientist as a participant within the cultural flows. Rather than attempting to hold a “mirror up to nature” the organizational scientist is invited to engage in inquiry with the specific aim of transforming culture. At the outset this would mean inquiring into the pragmatic potential of given research projects. To what communities does the research contribute, and in what ways? No longer would it suffice to respond in terms of increments to knowledge. Rather, one may ask about the contributions to organizational functioning that might result from the research. In more radical form, the organizational scientist would turn from observational study to action research. Here the outcomes of the research are coterminous with organizational

transformation. Or, as it is said, “The best way to predict the future is to invent it”.

Further dialogue on these issues is surely required. Nor should discussion be limited to these. Needed, as well, are discussions of our methods of inquiry, our relationship with the worlds outside the scholarly domain, moral and political relativism, the conception of the human being, and more. Some of these concerns will indeed be reflected in the sections that follow.

4.5 The originary process of co-action

I have long been concerned with the challenge of temporal process in the social sciences.¹ The most recent adventure, however, has grown from the widely shared critique of Western individualism. Cadres of critics **(p.61)** have deliberated on the ways in which this ideology fosters a sense of fundamental loneliness and alienation; generates a sense of pervasive doubt in oneself; invites one to think of oneself as the sole arbiter of what is good and evil; establishes a tension between self on the one hand and community on the other; defines relationships as secondary to the well-being of the self; and ultimately encourages forms of self-serving, narcissistic, and exploitative behavior. However, the major problem has been that of articulating an alternative to such a conception. Rather than pressing toward new visions of the human being, there is a tendency to revert to a pre-modern valuing of community over individuals. Yet, upon closer inspection we find that a strong communalism suffers from many of the same problems inhabiting individualism. Both propose the existence of bounded or independent units in a potential relationship of alienation. How may we conceptualize human action, then, without division as its foundation? If we can do so, we move toward the possibility of process-oriented study.

In my attempt to theorize such a world, I have found it first useful to focus on actions that are typically attributed to individual actors. We say, for example, that John is aggressive, Shirley is kind, Harold is deceitful, and so on. We have, then, what appear to be meaningful units. However, let us ask whether one's behavior is aggressive if others find it playful, or whether one is kind if others find one's action self-serving. Can the individual in himself possess attributes; can a meaningful agent exist in a social vacuum? It seems far more adequate to locate the attribute in the relationship between actor and other. And if this is so, then the identity of the unit—or the unitization—is a byproduct of an ongoing relational process. Let me expand on this possibility. I offer here a series of rudimentary propositions that place the identification of a meaningful actor, squarely within the relational matrix:

4.5.1 An individual's actions in themselves possess no meaning

We pass each other on the street. I smile and say, “Hello Anna.” You walk past without hearing. Under such conditions, what am I? To be sure, I have uttered

two words. However for all the difference it makes I might have stood on my head or offered a set of nonsense syllables. When you fail to acknowledge me in any way, no action has occurred. I am not an actor.

(p.62) 4.5.2 The potential for meaningful action is realized through the supplementary action of another

An individual's actions begin to acquire attributes when another (or others) coordinate themselves to the action, that is, when they add some form of supplementary action (whether linguistic or otherwise). Effectively, I have performed a greeting in the previous case only by virtue of Anna's response. Her utterance, "Oh, hi, good morning ..." brings me to life as one who has greeted. We thus find that becoming an identifiable actor is a privilege granted by others. If others do not treat one's utterances as meaningful, if they fail to coordinate themselves around the offering, one is reduced to a non-entity. To combine these first two proposals, we may say that one's identification as an independent actor depends on coordinated action. Indeed, our entire vocabulary of the individual—who thinks, feels, wants, hopes, and so on—is granted meaning only by virtue of coordinated activities among people. Their birth of "myself" lies within the relationship. Or more generally, individual entities acquire their existence for us (or not), depending on a process of coordination.

4.5.3 Supplementary action is itself a candidate for meaning

Any supplement functions twice, first in granting significance to what has preceded, and second as an action that also requires supplementation. In effect, the meaning it grants remains suspended until it too is supplemented. Consider an executive who advises a colleague on a decision he should take. The colleague can grant the executive existence as a meaningful agent by responding, "Yes, I can see why this might be a good idea." However, the colleague now stands idle as a meaningful agent until the executive provides a further supplement. If the executive ignored the statement, for example beginning to talk about her success as a mother, the colleague would be denied personhood. More broadly, we may say that in daily life there are no *acts in themselves*, that is, actions that are not simultaneously supplements to what has preceded. Whatever we do or say takes place within a temporal context that gives meaning to what has preceded, while simultaneously forming an invitation to further supplementation.

4.5.4 Acts and supplements are mutually constraining

If I give a lecture on organizational theory, my action is insignificant without an audience that listens, deliberates, affirms, or questions what **(p.63)** I have said. In this sense, every speaker owes to his or her audience a debt of gratitude; without their engagement the speaker ceases to exist. At the same time, my lecture creates the very possibility for the audience to grant me existence as a meaningful agent. In this sense, the actor's identity is not free to be itself, but is constrained by the act of supplementation. Supplementation thus operates

postfiguratively, to create the speaker as a particular form of being. From the enormous array of possibilities, the supplement gives direction and temporarily narrows the possibilities of action. At the same time, however, I as lecturer grant to them the capacity to create me in this way. They are without existence until there is an action that invites them into being.

Yet, it is also important to realize that in practice, actions also set constraints upon the kind of supplementation that takes place. If I speak on systems theory, audience members are limited in their replies. One may ask me a question about second-order systems, but not astrophysics, the concept of repression, or my taste in mushrooms. Such constraints exist because my actions are already embedded within a *tradition of act and supplement*. I have been granted existence as a lecturer on organizational theory, by virtue of previous generations of co-actors. In this sense, actions embedded within relationships have *prefigurative* potential. The history of usage enables them to invite or suggest certain supplements as opposed to others—because only these supplements are considered intelligible within a tradition. Thus, as we speak with each other, we also begin to set limits on each other's being; to remain in the conversation is not only to respect a tradition, but to accede to being one kind of person as opposed to another. Each comment constrains the potentials of the other's being.

4.5.5 While acts/supplements are constraining, they do not determine

As proposed, our words and actions function so as to constrain the words and actions of others, and vice versa. If we are to remain intelligible within our culture, we must necessarily act within these constraints. Such constraints have their origins in a history of preceding co-actions. As people coordinate actions and supplements, and come to rely on them in everyday life, they are essentially generating a way of life. If enough people join in these coordinated activities over a long period, we may speak of a cultural tradition. Yet, it is important to underscore that our words and actions function only as *constraints*, and *not as determinants*. This is so for two important reasons: first, the conditions under which we attempt to coordinate our actions are seldom constant. We are continuously faced with the **(p.64)** challenge of importing old words and actions into new situations. As we do so, such words and actions ever acquire new possibilities for usage. More formally, we say that all words are *polysemic*; they may be used in many different ways. And, because no two situations are identical, there is a sense in which every word is spoken for the first time. Or following Heraclitus, one cannot participate in the same sentence twice.

The preceding account briefly summarizes an orientation to organizational life in which there is no “fundamental *unit* of analysis.” The defining attributes of the unit cannot be attached to any specific, spatio-temporal location. Indeed, to designate the unit is already to enter into a flow of meaning making in such a way that the unit is temporarily brought into being. It is also important here to

point out the particular way in which I have made the case for a process out of which the very idea of units (persons, objects) emerge. In order to accomplish this I have had to rely on a language of nouns and pronouns to render an account of process. I have essentially described the process out of the very elements that the process denies existence. I cannot do otherwise by virtue of the fact that I rely on the English language to generate intelligibility. Thus, it is important to realize that I use the language in much the same way that Wittgenstein (1953) described the development of philosophical positions. They are ladders that enable me to bring the position into intelligibility, but which may ultimately be kicked away. In this sense, the entities employed to construct this process vision serve as temporary “place holders.” They are useful in building a vision, but once in place, their participation is no longer required.

4.6 From causality to confluence

Each thing, including each person, is first and always a nexus of relations.

Brent Slife

As proposed in the initial section of this chapter, a process orientation poses a challenge to traditional explanatory practices in organizational science. In particular, reliance on causal explanation—with its presumption of independent entities lodged within a system of causal interdependency—is placed in jeopardy. This view of causal relationships—if X then Y, if not X then not Y—has ancient origins. Aristotle termed it *efficient causation*. Centuries later, under Isaac Newton's influence, one could indeed begin to conceive of the universe as “one great machine,” with each of its **(p.65)** components causally related. For every event there is a cause, and to imagine an “uncaused cause” is to step outside the realm of science. As earlier discussed, such a view laid the groundwork for a social science directed toward increasingly accurate prediction and control of human behavior.

For centuries philosophers have debated the concept of causal explanation. Remaining unsolved, however, are major questions concerning the nature of causality. Most prominent among these, how can one unit “make happen” or “produce” changes in another? We see the flame on the stove, and then we observe the boiling water. But how did the flame “make” the water boil? If you ask me to pass the salt, what if anything determines that I will pass the shaker? We are left with a mystery. As some propose, we should abandon the idea of causal force. Rather, we should simply confine ourselves to prediction. We can predict rather reliably what will happen to a pot of water placed on a flame, or a request for salt at a dinner party. The concept of causal determination is an unjustified and unnecessary addition.

There is further reason to bracket the concept of cause and effect. In significant ways the concept contributes to the presumption of enduring entities. When we search for causal explanations for a person's actions, we split the world into

independent entities. There are causal units on the one hand and the units that are affected on the other. Yet, it follows from the preceding analysis that the units featured as cause and effect come into being as such through a process of co-action. What we term a “cause” is only so by virtue of our specifying an “effect.” By the same token, there are no “effects” in the world unless we can point to a possible cause. If one gazes at the world about, it is impossible to separate the causes and effects. Cause and effect are co-constituting.

It is useful to expand on this point: you are walking by a park and see a man throw a ball into an open space before him. An aimless activity, you surmise, scarcely notable on a summer's day. Now, consider the same action when the ball is thrown to someone wearing a catcher's mitt. Suddenly the individual's action can be identified as “pitching.” In effect, there is no pitching until there is catching, and no catching until there is pitching. We look further to find that there is a man with a bat, bags that form a diamond shape, men holding mitts in the field, and so on. At this point we might justifiably conclude that this is a “baseball game.” What we traditionally view as “independent” elements—the man with the bat, the bags, the men in the field—are not meaningfully independent. They are all mutually defining. A man standing alone in the field wearing a mitt would not be **(p.66)** playing baseball, nor would the bags constitute a game. Alone they would be virtually without meaning. It is when we bring all these elements into a mutually defining relationship that we can speak about “playing baseball.” Let us then speak of the baseball game as a *confluence*, a form of life in this case that is constituted by an array of mutually defining “entities.”

Let us further enrich this analytic space. In particular, it can be useful to view each of the “entities” as an arrested moment in what we may term a *vector*. The baseball player appears as a unit within the game, but he is effectively *in process*. He is not the same human who entered the playing field, nor will he be the same person who departs. His playing the game is ultimately a “moment” in the vector of what minimally can be viewed as a life cycle transformation. Similarly, the batter holds an object that was once a growing tree, then cut and trimmed, and placed into service. At some point it may be consumed by flames. It serves as a “bat” by virtue of the way it is co-constituted in the moment of the game. In this way we can view the game as a whole as a historically contingent period in which all the mutually defining “entities” are—relatively speaking—momentarily arrested.

Here we have a preliminary sketch of an approach to understanding organizational process. The identification of the independent units is always in terms of their co-constitution within a confluence. And, as all “components” of the confluence are vectoring across time, they shift their “thing-ness” along with the continuous transformation of the relational configuration. If the contours of

such a formulation could be developed more fully, what would it mean for organizational understanding and practice. I briefly consider three possibilities.

4.6.1 The explanation of action

At the outset, in our attempts to understand organizational life, we may replace causal explanation with a confluence-based orientation. We may replace the metaphors of billiard balls and unmoved movers with the metaphors of baking or doing chemistry. The concern now shifts from isolated entities to the combination of ingredients. With a combination of flour, oil, eggs, milk, and a griddle, we bring about a pancake. By compounding hydrogen and oxygen atoms we have water. From this standpoint, a lighted match does not *cause* the combustion of gasoline; rather the combustion is the achievement of a particular combination of flame, gasoline vapors, and oxygen. In the same way, what scholars might (p.67) define as an intellectual attack does not cause another to argue; the argument comes into being only when another responds with a defense.

In terms of organizational practice, this would mean redirecting attention from single entities to the relational confluence making up the whole. It is not the traits of the individual that count, for example, but the nature of the relational process into which the individual fits (and which might subsequently be altered by his or her presence). It is not the characteristics of a given machine technology, a benefits package, a new business opportunity, or a new office building that should rivet our attention, but the character which these “entities” acquire as they are insinuated into a particular confluence. Operationally, a sensitivity to confluence would seemingly invite more democratic workplace practices. Whether a given “entity” fits comfortably and productively within the confluence will vitally depend on the supplemental actions of the organizational participants.

4.6.2 Future building

As proposed, a confluence orientation is designed as an analytic companion to a process approach to organizations. It must first be noted, however, that there is nothing about a process orientation, or confluence theory in particular, that rules out prediction. Most commonly, the process of co-action will tend toward reliable or repeated forms of relationship. Consider the game of golf. We can predict reasonably well what club most players will select when their ball is in a sand trap, or when they find their ball is several inches from the cup. The confluence of “playing golf” is a longstanding and repetitive tradition, and its rules effectively reinforced. In this sense, the game functions as a relatively closed system. It is relatively insulated from changes in the larger culture of which it is a part. Most organizations do not enjoy such tranquility. The conditions of organizational life are in continuous motion, and with the increased

speed and magnitude in the flow of information and people across the globe, the rapidity and complexity of change will only increase.

From a confluence standpoint, attention recedes from attempting to predict the future to actively creating it. Within the organization, for example, the emphasis on generating predictions of the market, and planning accordingly, would recede. Attention would be directed, instead, to asking how one might generate favorable market conditions. Organizational scientists, in this case, would be less given to assessing “the way organizations function” than to asking, for example, how they might help **(p.68)** to create a particular kind of organization. In effect, the challenge of the organizational specialist shifts from describing and explaining what exists, to aiding in the construction of what could exist.

4.6.3 From progress to protean potentials

Related to the discussion of future building, a confluence orientation suggests a shift in approach to organizational development. In keeping with the modernist vision of infinite progress, one typically views the organization in terms of its potential for infinite strengthening and expansion. However, this view is closely linked to the traditional scientific view of prediction and control of identifiable entities. With today's increasing consciousness of the environmental threat posed by the view of infinite progress, many analysts and practitioners turn their attention to sustainability. While attractive in certain respects, the sustainability metaphor is again limited in its presumption of an identifiable entity—this time one that reaches an optimal form of stability.

From a confluence orientation, however, we may dispense both with infinite progress or stabilization of *the* organization. Rather, it is useful to view organizational processes in terms of their protean potentials. How capable is the organization in reforming itself as the conditions of confluence shift over time? Rather than emphasizing the core business that one is attempting to develop and/or sustain, for example, one may inquire into the various ways in which it may be redirected, retooled, or re-imagined, such that different opportunities may be explored. Cell phone technology provides an excellent example in this case, as an object originally designed to be a phone rapidly becomes a camera, a game board, an internet outlet, an alarm clock, a geographic position finder, and much more. In effect, the cell phone business has continued to morph over time, reforming with the changing technological and market conditions. By the same token, one may inquire into the necessity of building fixed structures, purchasing large pieces of equipment, establishing fixed operating procedures, or designating fixed job descriptions. All may represent reductions in protean potential.

4.7 Parting words

The preceding discussion has attempted to wrestle with the implications of “taking process seriously.” Although world conditions today favor a shift in organizational studies toward a process orientation, there are also **(p.69)** significant challenges to be confronted. Not only are many of the assumptions of the empiricist orientation to inquiry placed in jeopardy, but it proves difficult to conceptualize pure process in terms of the linguistic resources at our disposal. The preceding discussions represent exploratory steps in the direction of theorizing process. In the account of co-action, we began to see how relational process could bring about the conception of objects or persons as “entities.” In effect, process preceded essences. In the account of confluence, the relational account was expanded. Rather than focusing on the relational dance of co-action, we began to see how an entire array of mutually defining “entities” could be formed. The emphasis on the confluence leads us into further speculations about organizational inquiry and action. It must finally be underscored, however, that these attempts are in no way thrusts toward conclusions. Rather, my greatest hope is to invite further discussion. And applying the theory of co-action, such discussion need never reach a conclusion.

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Notes:

(1.) See, for example, Gergen and Gergen, 1984; Gergen, 1994.

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