Seminar Cultural Organization and cultural entrepreneurship
Essay 2: Culture and Organization

Cameron and Quinn claim **that** *culture matters* in the organization. They tried to prove that ignoring the *organizational culture* precludes the possibility of change in the organization. But they have not helped much in understanding **why** culture matters. [1]

What is the meaning of culture with respect to organization? Here I come back to the point I started to elaborate upon in my first essay: We have to understand how culture organizes us; how culture inhabits the structures and processes of organizations…

[Since you're not keen on introductory definitions, I won't take space for that. Anyway, some of the concepts I'll use here have been used in my first essay: especially the concept of *conventions* (in a constructivist sense). So let's jump right into our last conversation at the seminar[2]…]

One difficult issue we bumped into was *how do you change culture in the organization?* For example, the clan-culture of the Dutch (Klamer and Sacha) makes it difficult to change the culture within a specific Dutch organization (Casper). Indeed, as Philippe D'Iribarne (*La logique de l'honneur, gestion des entreprises et traditions nationales)* has shown, the national culture has a strong influence, making it difficult :
- for managers in the organization to go against the current.
- for individuals to move trans-nationally (ex. of the French having difficulties to understand work-organization in the Netherlands).

This points us to one of the properties associated with what we mean by *culture*: We are dealing with institutions, ways of doing things that have some constancy (Klamer). The institution reveals boundaries for the motives and values of an organization. These boundaries are set because of the patterns shaped through *conventions*. But sticking to this doesn't help in understanding change. Indeed, *culture* is not static (Casper). We shall not ignore the dynamic processes at stake. Maybe conflict and fragmentation within the organizational culture should not be ignored as Cameron and Quinn do (Sacha). This because confrontation makes you aware of your culture (Kombrink); change in the environment participates in that and therefore should be acknowledged (Stefano).

Therefore, let me try to tell you the story of culture as an organizing force: I hope the picture I'll draw will help in bringing together the insights we had I the last seminar.[3]

Imagine culture as a three-level processive structure: (see scheme 1) From one side I[4] bring in infrastructural/background/unconscious archetypes (Jung and Lévi-Strauss). From the other side I bring subjective/symbolic computation by the individual. At the central level of
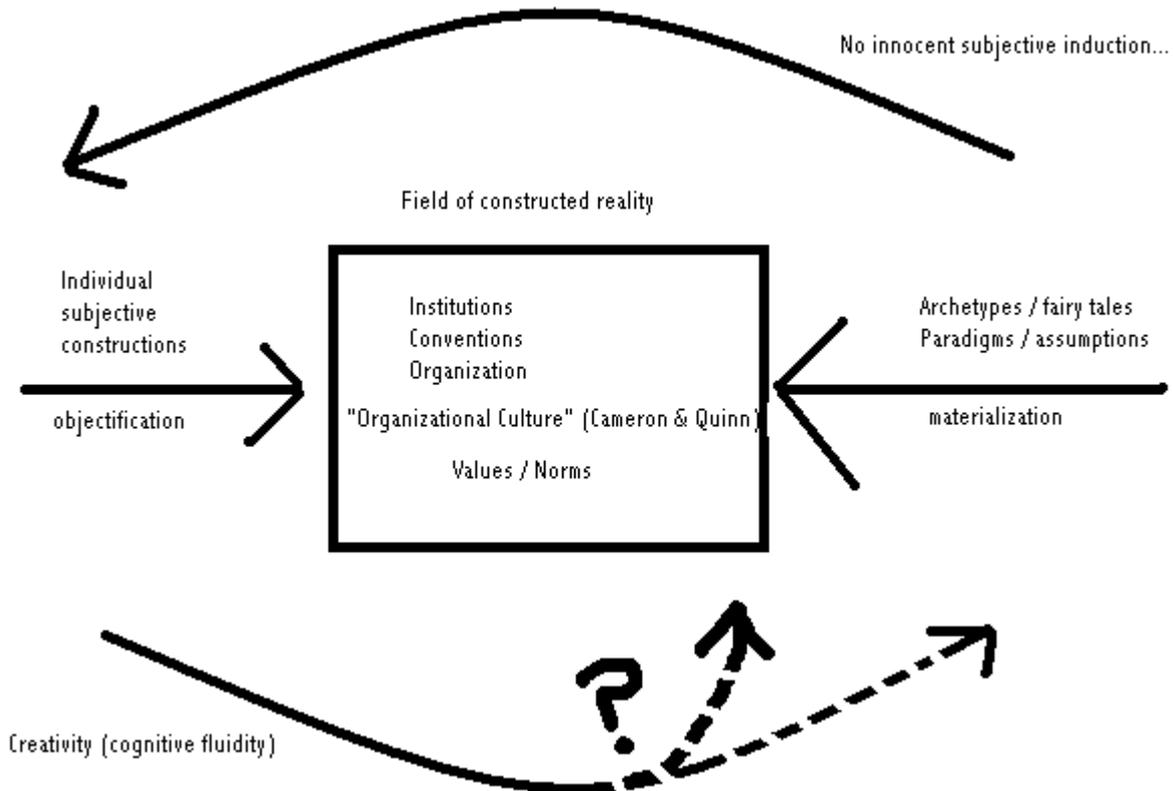
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[1] Although this may look like an "exordium", I am not going to *follow* your methodological trail: This just because I am starting my 6th effective year at University, and each year I have met some new enlighteners offering their methodologies as "the key" to writing essays/dissertations. But methodologies also shrink the mind-processes of students, so that scientific work is so boring because it is predictable. I have already had to acquire too many methodological *conventions* in myself, so allow my allergic reaction to your latin bis repetita. The only fundamental methodology I'll keep comes from its Greek origin: *the path*. I'll try to follow a narrative path going from a point to another point, which may or may not be the starting-point itself.

[2] Well, that could be a "narratio" if you like: the background of our discussion in the seminar…

[3] Gash, is this a "probatio"? Or is it rather a Com Putatio (Com Putare: Contemplate the things together, cf. Heinz von Foerster)?

[4] The constructivist paradigm I'm attracted to by now, forces me to say "I", to insist that all I say is, in fine, my own construction.

this cultural maelstrom, are developed the constructed/interactive/conscious discursive stories of reality. Reality is born through social organization thanks to the symbolic processes taking place within the three levels of culture.

No innocent subjective induction...

Field of constructed reality

Individual subjective constructions

objectification

Institutions
Conventions
Organization

"Organizational Culture" (Cameron & Quinn)

Values / Norms

Archetypes / fairy tales
Paradigms / assumptions

materialization

Creativity (cognitive fluidity)

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Scheme 1

The movements of, and interactions between, these three levels give rise to complex perceived movements, changes, contradictions and integrations in culture. Culture is thus very complex because multi-framed, and some frames are harder to handle than others.

Institutions and organizations are essential because they constitute a space for the collective objectification of subjective constructions of reality (already mentioned economic school of conventions + in sociology Berger and Luckmann, *The social construction of reality*), i.e. a space for the development of common symbols tied together into common *stories* through *conversations* that construct *values* (Klamer, *The lives of cultural goods*) but also a space for the translation of deeper structures (paradigms, common assumptions) into norms and rules that get internalized.

Culture does affect economic behaviour. "[E]conomic behaviour takes place within a world that is more or less 'taken for granted' and perceived by individuals as self-evident." (Hans Dieleman)[5] Economic behaviour derives from the way reality is perceived. Previous experiences influence the way problems are seen and how solutions are explored (this = dimensions of path-dependency[6]). Moreover, often it is not optimization but risk-reduction which is pursued (this = preference for the known and secure).

Economic behaviour and human behaviour in general, have to do with selection in information and construction of a reality (Watzlawick[7]). But also, "behaviour is constantly
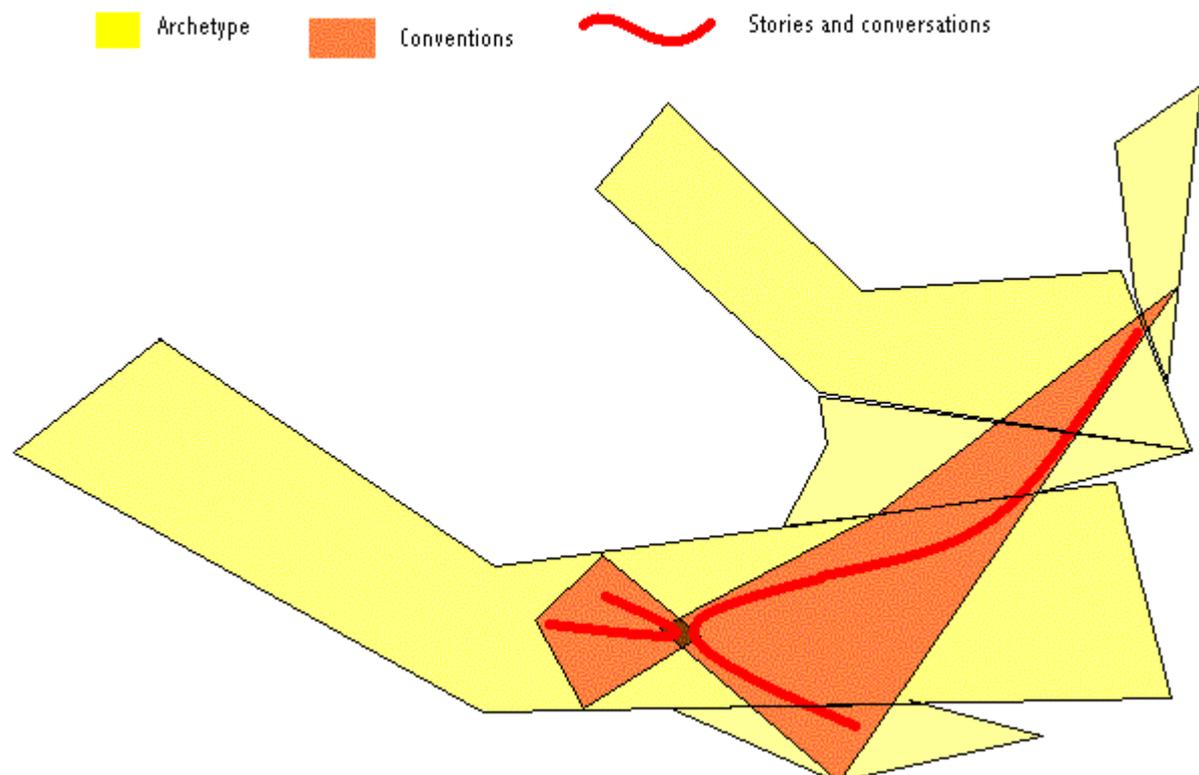
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[5] Hans Dieleman, *De Arena van schonere productie, mens en organisatie tussen behoud en verandering,* Eburon, 1999.
[6] Isnt it what Altug Yalcintas is working on?
[7] Ed. Paul Watzlawick, *Die erfundene Wirklichkeit* (I have the french translation).

adjusted through new experiences. There is a continuous interaction between thinking and doing."[8] (cf. Dieleman in sociology, Lahire in psychological sociology, von Foerster and Damasio in cognitive sciences…).

In this context, what is the individual doing? Let me call back a fellow sociologist: According to Erving Goffman[9], social interaction is a "performance" shaped by environment and audience to give others "impressions" which are desired by the social actor. To establish an identity, individuals create a "front" which allows others to understand who they are. The front creates an appearance, personality traits and attitudes which unite with the individual's behavior. How is the front and how are values constructed, within the cultural framework I've drawn? Conventions and institutions determine social fields of interaction; fairy tales and archetypes determine assumptions; stories and conversations determine values (scheme 2).

Scheme 2

If you can become aware of your values via constructing stories consciously, could you become aware of your assumptions[10]? Your assumptions stem from unconsciously believed fairy-tales that are in the background of your images and stories. Here I will quote Christian Corail, the character of a psychoanalyst in the film *Généalogie d'un crime* (Raoul Ruiz): "Behind human sciences is hidden Law. And behind law, fairy tales. […] Fairy tales act on us like diseases or daemons. […] Humans believe they experience stories but it is the stories that possess humans."[11]

The individual is then not as free as he should be in order to bring about change in culture… This is because one element yet has to be added… This element is creativity.

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[8] The quote is actually from Dieleman, but I found this claim in many other places.

[9] Erving Goffman, *The presentation of self in everyday life*, Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1959.

[10] Cf. *paradigms* in the sense of Kuhn: invisible from within…

[11] My translation. French spoken original: "Derrière les sciences humaines se cache le droit. Et derrière le droit, des comptes de fées. […] Les comptes de fées agissent sur nous comme des maladies ou des démons. […] Les hommes croient vivre des histoires mais ce sont les histoires qui possèdent les hommes ».

It is difficult to break through the mould of conventions, and maybe impossible to escape from archetypes. Here comes transcendental creativity (Kombrink in *Cultural Capital and well-being* talks about the 'sublime'[12], after Klamer) as an impetus getting through conventions and through spheres of reality (Hans van de Braak, now working on evolutionary psychology at the EUR in the FSW, tries to describe how that is possible and what 'ingredients' are needed for the creative breakthrough to take place[13]).

Creativity is a solution to bounded rationality in the context of Conventions: The perfect logic rationality as presented by standard economists simply does not take place, and the rational activities of individuals soon find their limits (H Simon + Damasio). What allows problem-solving is intuition. "This process is based on matching opportunities with existing representation in peoples' memory. It is a highly intuitive process, using different kinds of symbol structures." (Dieleman)

In the last session of the seminar, I was advocating for acknowledging conflict and fragmentation as essential to organizational fluidity (the self-contradiction of the manager in Cameron and Quin being seen as a metonymy of self-contradiction in the organization: contradiction fosters individual cognitive fluidity in the first case; it fosters cultural-conventions fluidity in the second case). Indeed, confrontation of conflicting constructed realities may give some space for creativity.

Creativity is thus not only a matter of the artist alone. If culture matters (a lot) to the organization, creativity matters (a lot) to cultural change.

I will leave you now with these propositions from Heinz von Foerster (one of the fathers of constructivism) as points for continuing our *conversation*:

"The *ethical imperative* will be: Always act in order to increase the number of possible choices. The *aesthetical imperative* will be: If you want to see, learn to act."[14]

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[12] In my comments on the text of Kombrink I explain why I prefer the *transcendental* to the *sublime*. (I am not going to write the same thing twice, in the comments and the essay, so I invite you to look there too.)
[13] See the latest book of Hans van de Braak, which I did not read yet but saw a PPT presentation about: *Ontsnapingkunst, Evolutie van de creatieve geest.*
[14] My translation from the french translation of Ed. Paul Watzlawick, *Die erfundene Wirklichkeit.*