

**Narrative Identity in Transition:  
the lived experience of an organisational merger  
in local government**

Bonna Margaret Jones

B.Soc.Sci.  
(Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology)

Grad.Dip.App.Psych.  
(Swinburne University of Technology)

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Business

Swinburne University of Technology

Hawthorn, Victoria 3122

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## Summary

This thesis is concerned with the question of how narrative activity influences the conditions in which a new sense of self is actively emergent for an employee at a time of organisational merger.

It is contended that an organisational merger is a transformational event with complex temporal and spatial characteristics, involving the activities of making shared meaning (MacIntyre, 1981; Ricoeur, 1974a), narrative-making (Carr, 1986; MacIntyre, 1981; Ricoeur, 1984, 1985, 1988) and positioning (Bourdieu, 1993, 1998b). These activities are central to the conditions in which persons and organisations are both formed and reformed. Consideration of how they are part of a project of narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1984, 1985, 1988, 1992) opens new possibilities in our understanding of the lived experience of a merger.

In appropriating narrative theory, this thesis is exploratory in nature as narrative ideas have not, to date, been applied to an understanding of the lived experience of an organisational merger. Mergers are currently understood as a clash of cultures, and a merger is treated as a marriage with partners, compatibility, commitment, rituals, dominance and fit. Whereas culture is construed in the literature as a quality that differentiates one organisation from another, and personal experience is understood in terms of adjusting to the presence of another culture, in this thesis a different theory is employed.

The main theory integration in this thesis gives prominence to the dynamic of activity/passivity (Allen & Starr, 1982; Schelling, 1800/1978) and the notions of

agency, relationship, transformation, and identity. Narrative theory is integrated with social theory (Bourdieu, 1998b) to enrich our understanding of these notions. Hence this thesis extends the contribution of Drummond (1996, 1998), and is situated in the constructive postmodern stance of process philosophy (Gare, in press-a; Griffin, 1993). This stance is invoked as a response to calls for better theories of action in management studies (Reed, 1996; Wilmott, 1994). It is argued, in agreement with Gare (in press-a, in press-b), that living organisms have a complexity that makes it difficult to maintain a state of indifference with respect to changes in their environment, and that they must form and reform themselves as products. Attention within management studies to self-organising activity at the levels of person, organisation and field of practice, is therefore central to our understanding of complex events such as organisational mergers. In this regard narrative-making and positioning are self-organising activities that are yet to be brought to centre stage in management theory. While no previous work has been done to apply narrative ideas to an understanding of mergers, such a move is nevertheless consistent with the increasing interest in narrative that is occurring across the theoretical divides in management studies.

The application in this thesis concerns a merger of two government organisations. These organisations, herein given the fictitious names of 'Anessa' and 'Isengate' (for reasons of confidentiality), were each part of what is usually referred to in local government as 'a council'. This thesis is about the employees in these organisations during this time of political amalgamation of the two councils, and the consequent organisational merger. Through interviews with informants, the use of

documents, and the integration of theory, a narrative is created. Of the many narratives that could be offered about this merger, it is the narrative given here that constitutes a response to the research question. Hence the methodology used sustains the purpose, which is to contribute to a reading experience, and the possibility of new interpretations regarding the lived experience of an organisational merger.

This thesis concludes that it is at the level of 'ongoing argument' that persons and organisations are contributors to the process of 'making shared meaning'. At the federal level of government this argument is about how best to govern, and at the level of the field of practice it encompasses the argument over what constitutes public service activity. The State Government of Victoria actively furthered this contest when it undertook local government reform. It is argued that their narrative about local government reform has a life as part of 'economic rationalism' (Pusey, 1991), and it proceeds from an ideological position in a tradition of readings known as 'neoliberalism' (Bourdieu, 1998a).

In this thesis employees are regarded as actively emergent beings living out a process of narrative identity. Under the authorship of the State Government employees were positioned as passive characters in the narrative of local government reform. For the employees considered in this thesis, this brought closure to a current and projected life narrative as a public servant at the local level. Their response was to reauthor their position to transcend this limitation, but it was found that this activity could be further limited according to the capital an employee could acquire in the form of 'time to tell a story' and 'space to tell a story'.

The main contribution of this thesis, as a response to calls for better theories of action in management studies, is an exploration of how individual employees are processes of becoming, and how they participate in the becoming of the organisation and field to which they contribute. It is concluded that employees could be valued as processes of becoming, and this is a major contribution that they make to the field and organisation.

## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree at any university, or other educational institution, and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

Bonna Margaret Jones



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## Part 1 Mergers

In late 1994 two local government organisations were merged, or joined together, to form a new organisation. This thesis is about some employees in these organisations. The purpose is to ask how narrative activity influences the conditions in which a new sense of self is actively emergent for an employee at a time of organisational merger.

In the relationship of persons to government in Australia, local government is constituted by a number of local councils and each of these undertakes governance of a local area and provides services to people and households (Butterworths Australian legal dictionary, 1997). Local councils are largely supported by local taxes collected as 'rates' that are levied annually on property owners.

Each State and the Northern Territory has a number of local government areas, known variously as cities, towns, municipalities, boroughs, shires or districts. The generic local body is the council. In October 1999 there were 730 councils [across Australia]. Most councillors and alderman are elected by local residents, though councils may be dismissed by State Governments and occasionally are (Australia. Commonwealth Government, 2001, p. 68).

The designation 'local council', which is open to varied use, will be taken in this thesis as a reference to a whole, which for each council is constituted by these parts: a physical or geographical area encompassed by electoral boundaries, a body of ratepayers who vote in local elections, an elected body of councillors referred to as 'the council', and an organisation. 'Local government' and 'local council' are more or

less the same with respect to meaning, but the former tends to refer to the whole level and the latter to a single electorate.

With regard to people, the employees of a local government organisation are involved in service provision, and management of services including rubbish collection and recycling, some local road engineering, public libraries, sporting facilities, planning and building approvals, community and aged care services. These employees, through their Chief Executive Officer (CEO), are accountable to the elected councillors; they are in effect public servants who carry out the policy decisions made by elected representatives at the local level.

In Australia there are three levels of government. In addition to local government there are state governments that are accountable to the electorate at the level of a state, which is larger in size than a local council. There is also a national government that is accountable at the national level. (Note for the purposes of this thesis 'national', 'federal', and 'Commonwealth Government' can be taken as referring to the same level of government).

The organisational merger which is considered in this thesis occurred because of the actions of the State Government of Victoria. It was legislation passed at the state level that brought about 'local government amalgamations', hence the City of Solmarco was created. Before this event there were two local councils comprising elected councillors (sitting as two political bodies), which I shall call the 'City of Isengate' and the 'City of Anessa', and two organisations, which I shall call 'Isengate' and 'Anessa'. After the amalgamation there was one local council, the 'City of Solmarco', and one organisation, called in this thesis 'Solmarco'. There was a

temporarily appointed CEO, but no elected councillors as these had been replaced by administrators called 'Commissioners' (numbering three for the City of Solmarco). In the round of amalgamations to which the City of Solmarco belonged, the original CEOs and the elected councillors were dismissed, the former being replaced by temporary CEOs and the latter being replaced by the State Government appointed Commissioners. Those employed in the old organisations, apart from the CEOs, continued to work for Solmarco initially, although many employees would leave or be forced to leave Solmarco during the early months of 1995. (Note that invented names have been substituted for given names).

As attention to notions of organisation, self-organisation, and activity are central to this thesis, it is appropriate to consider how 'organisation' can be defined. In everyday or ordinary language we have both "organizing or being organized" and an "organized body or system or society" (The Australian concise Oxford dictionary of current English, 1987, p. 765). A popular textbook defines an organisation as "a consciously coordinated social unit, composed of two or more people, that functions on a relatively continuous basis to achieve a common goal or set of goals" (Robbins, Millet, Cacioppe, Waters-Marsh, 1998, p. 5). These definitions suggest the presence of relationship and of ongoing activity which has 'formation' or 'form'. Hence it is a short move to construe an organisation as a form that has the capacity to 'act back' on the conditions of its own formation. That is, an organisation acts back as an organic or living form of activity that occurs in relationship to other forms of activity (Gare, in press-a). Furthermore, the activity of making formation can be understood to be

present not just at the level of 'an organisation', but also at different levels of organisation.

'Activity' is of central interest because it will be argued in this thesis that making shared meaning (MacIntyre, 1981; Ricoeur, 1974b), narrative activity (Carr, 1986; MacIntyre, 1981; Ricoeur, 1984), and positioning (Bourdieu, 1993, 1998b), or what could also be called 'relationship-making' or 'position-making', are forms of activity that are integral to processes of self-organisation, and are operational at the various levels of organisation (person, organisation, culture and other such large social forms). It follows that activities form a process and there are associated 'products' to the extent that we can speak of a process being 'productive'. Living beings are seen here, then, to be in a process of forming and reforming themselves as products; that is, they are understood as actively emergent beings. While many in management presuppose that 'productive' has its counterpart in 'unproductive', in this thesis 'productive' is taken to be a potency of a process, and any process has openness of possibility with regard to 'productivity'.

Schelling (1800/1978) argues that the counterpart of 'activity' is 'passivity', and it is this dynamic that is given prominence in this thesis. Accordingly, productivity consists of opposed activities limiting each other:

If we reflect that the force corresponding to the productive activity is the true synthesizing force of nature, namely gravity, we shall be persuaded that this subordination is none other than the subordination of celestial objects one to another, as it occurs in the universe; a subordination such that organization of these bodies into systems, where one is conserved in its being by the next, is

nothing else but an organization of intelligence itself, which throughout all these products is continually in search of the absolute point of equilibrium with itself, albeit that this point lies in infinity (Schelling, 1800/1978, p. 114).

Schelling (1800/1978) reminds us that while we begin with a present product in an empirical sense, such a product is part of a succession and we must presuppose a universe of reciprocity or "a dynamic simultaneity of all substances" (p. 114). This dynamic forms the conditions for productivity. In management studies the assertion that activity and passivity mutually limit each other, could be regarded as central to the interplay of the various levels of organisation (construed as processes of becoming). In this thesis it will be argued that the emergence of self for an employee is a process that is occurring simultaneously with the transition unfolding at the level of 'the organisation' as a process of becoming, but it will also be argued that the latter is not isolated from larger ongoing processes. Solmarco is a new organisation which is likely to have a more complex level of existence than its predecessors - Isengate and Anessa. With regard to who does what to whom, which is a central concern of narrative, it can be said that an employee is 'acted upon' as a counterpart to the action of merging two organisations into one. If activity is occurring simultaneously at various levels of organisation, as Schelling's ideas posit, then the complexity of these processes challenges not just our understanding, but also that of employees. The presumption that an employee is passive in the midst of such activity is unlikely to be part of that employee's personal narrative account, but the nature of this activity/passivity dynamic is yet to be explored using narrative theory (Carr, 1986; MacIntyre, 1981; Ricoeur, 1984) in management studies.



With regard to products in a narrative form, we shall see later in this thesis how Ricoeur (1984) defines narrative as the process of inventing a plot which brings together goals, causes and chance within a temporal unity to form a new congruence in the organisation of events. Just as living beings can be construed as actively emergent beings due to their processes of formation and re-formation, so a narrative in text form is construed as a product, described here as an 'achievement' of the process of narrative making. A judgement, when applied to what is achieved, is the realm of that part of the process of reading that is narrative analysis. This activity of making an analysis is carried out by an agent or 'reader', hence we can say that it is a human activity and it is possible to inquire about agency through the question 'who is the agent?'. Only through such analysis can a process be regarded as 'productive' in the sense usually intended in management studies. In this thesis the purpose is to give prominence to narrative activity, and to treat products as situated in the processes through which they are achieved to have what could be called a life of their own. In other words products are not treated in isolation of the whole of which they are a part. Furthermore, it is human to ask about authorship. Hence to argue that there can be productivity in isolation of negatively valued products is meaningless without the simultaneous inquiry about who is making this argument, that is, through the question 'who is the author?'.

To say that there is narrative activity and this is 'productive' is to postulate the presence of human processes that contribute to narrative activity as a whole process (Carr, 1986; Ricoeur, 1984, 1985, 1988). For example when a person engages in narrative activity in the living of a life, the narrative account that she can make about

her life is an achievement; it is the activity that gives rise to this achievement that is of interest in this thesis. The purpose is to ask how this activity both contributes to and is influenced by narrative activity at other levels of organisation. "Nature regarded as mere product is for us an object; but as productivity, it is for us subject" (Gare, in press-a, p. 18).

If living beings, in this case employees/informants, are construed as actively emergent beings, they may also be understood as living out a process of becoming. We shall see that for Ricoeur (1992) there is a series of dialectics at work in the process of narrating an identity. Firstly, there is a dialectic of explanation and understanding, whereby a process of interpretation involves a threefold movement of interpretation, understanding and explanation; in other words a person interprets a symbol, understands it and then explains its meaning as part of one set of operations. Secondly Ricoeur attends to the importance of the dialectic between self and other, which he suggests is multiple in the sense that it is characterised by experience of one's own body, the self of reciprocity or dialogue with other people, and the dialogue with what can be thought of as the 'other within' or conscience. Thirdly there is the dialectic of identity, which is shaped by narrative in time. Each of these he argues contribute to a dynamic relationship between sameness and selfhood, by which he means that we can be identified in time as the same person, but we also change over time as we develop selfhood. To reach a consideration of narrative identity in this thesis I propose to begin with the lived experience of the organisational merger. In this regard, the intention is to treat 'lived experience' as the whole, or productivity (Schelling, 1800/1978), in which a personal experience could be considered to be part

of a process of becoming. In this emphasis, the idea that there is experience at the level of person or 'individual' is retained, but not isolated from 'lived experience'.

We shall see that a theory of narrative identity has not, to date, featured in our understanding of the merging of two organisations to form a new organisation. The English language literature on mergers is devoted to the centrality of 'organisation culture', and the emphasis on a person's capacity to adapt to a new culture. No consideration has been given to date to what Reed (1996) refers to as the need to develop explanatory theories in which "agency derives from the simultaneously enabling and contradictory nature of the structural principles by which people act" (p. 46). But in the following we shall see that when organisation culture is construed as 'shared meaning', there is an invitation to revisit this question of agency by beginning at the level of language with a theory of interpretation. In this manner both persons and organisations can be construed as contributors to the 'ongoing activity' of making shared meaning.

Researchers do acknowledge that the human aspects of mergers remain mysterious. Cartwright and Cooper (1996) emphasise this when they comment:

Although mergers and acquisitions are something which happens to people in organizations rather than to organizations in any abstract sense, the human aspects of the phenomenon have received relatively little attention. Indeed, "people" are largely ignored or dismissed as being a soft or mushy issue by those who initiate or guide the merger decision. Consequently, people have come to be labeled the 'forgotten or hidden factor' in merger success (p. 2).

It has been possible above to set the scene regarding some of the concepts that will be used in the following. As we have seen, these include 'local government', 'organisation', 'activity', 'productivity', 'narrative identity' and 'lived experience'. But it is emphasised that even at this level of definition it should be apparent to the readers of this thesis that there are acts of authorship, and this highlights how the meaning offered herein is not fulfilled until there is the activity of reading (Ricoeur, 1984). Readers who read the following with the expectation of finding complete descriptions of 'products', whether these be definitions, or employees or possibly an organisation culture, will find in this thesis a different direction, one that draws its purpose from developments in process thought as these are elaborated by Gare (1996). For example, there is no intention to fully describe two organisations using the construct of 'organisation culture', and then to ask about differences between employees based on possible differences or gaps between two organisation cultures. Rather the emphasis will be on the differing levels of activity that according to Schelling's definition could be present at a time of merger, and how these dynamics could form the conditions for productivity in an individual life. This relies on the assumption that it is a process that is 'real' (Schelling, 1800/1978) and it is processes that call for explanation, albeit our attempts to do this may never find complete expression. This emphasis is not a move that denies the importance of achievements, construed possibly as an organisation culture or a personal identity, but rather one that relates these to an understanding of productivity and the forces present in levels of productivity. Following Schelling, it is posited that a consideration of products must be situated within a consideration of the whole whereby processes and products

are in relationship to each other and part of productivity, but more importantly that the conditions in which products are achieved could be of great interest when it comes to engaging in research that considers the emergent nature of self for employees at a time of organisational merger.

These conditions have so far in thesis been construed through Schelling's use of 'activity/passivity', and Reed's phrase 'simultaneously enabling and contradictory nature', but the contribution of Allen and Starr (1982) may further show the direction being pursued. According to these authors the notions of order and organisation could be considered to be central to general systems theory. They suggest that the prevailing interest in the organisation present in biological systems, for example, shows support for a conventional biological wisdom that always views 'organisation' in positive terms. But they argue that it may be advantageous to view organisation not positively as a series of connections, but rather negatively as a series of constraints:

Ordered systems are so, not because of what the components do, but rather because of what they are not allowed to do. The emergent properties of nerves are so full of positive achievement that it is hard to remember that they work only because of restrictions placed on the position and movement of sodium and potassium ions. It is what sodium and potassium in the nerve cannot do that supports the emergent property of nerve reaction (Allen & Starr, 1982, p. 11).

The operation of constraint across levels of activity is what is of interest in this thesis. In this regard a new sense of self, like a new organisation, could be construed as a process of becoming that is both enabled and constrained to evolve.

So far in this part there have been preferred definitions offered for some terms based on the theory direction to be pursued. Consistent with the work of Schelling (1800/1978), it is emphasised that there are conditions for productivity in a person's life, and that attention to the activity/passivity dynamic could enable a consideration of a person as a process of becoming (Gare, 1996). Furthermore, productivity is present at the level of organising activity that is construed as 'the organisation'; that is, at this level there is also a process of becoming. As we shall see in the rest of this part, this opens possibilities for possible extension of the literature on mergers through consideration of the emergent nature of self for employees at a time of organisational merger.

It is also appropriate at this early stage of writing to give readers an indication of how this thesis is arranged. The first part covers the literature on organisational mergers and organisational culture, and also includes a consideration of the recent interest in narrative ideas as these are seen in management studies. The second part is a consideration of the methodological issues as these pertain to the interviews undertaken, but also to the narrative making undertaken at the level of writing and structuring the thesis itself. The third part picks up where the first part finished, by arguing that culture involves the making of shared meaning, and this is an activity that evolves through the process of an ongoing dialectic or argument. At this stage of the thesis structure, excerpts from interviews are given to show examples of the application of the theory. But in addition, the overall argument that is being made at the level of the whole thesis has its beginning in this part. In the fourth part there is a synthesis of the narrative theories of Ricoeur (1984, 1985, 1988, 1992), Carr (1986),

and MacIntyre (1981). Part 5 applies this narrative theory, along with social theory (Bourdieu, 1998b), to the actions of the State Government of Victoria, and the counterpart of this is Part 6 where the narrative-making of some employees is considered using the theory integration achieved in the earlier parts of the thesis. Part 7 draws together the argument being made and brings the thesis to its conclusion.

As process thought is emphasised, readers will find in this thesis a structure that favours the argument being advanced herein. Following the arguments put by Ricoeur (1984, 1988, 1985) and Bourdieu (1998b), no distinction between 'subjective' and 'objective' is emphasised. A thesis structure that favours this distinction through a separation of theory and practice is therefore not appropriate. Briefly, following the first two parts, the major structure that emerges for this thesis is one that follows the levels of activity that are of interest – those of field of practice (government in Australia), the organisation (Solmarco), and employee (given the names Ki, Rom, Red, Keep, Dune, Tem). Consistent with process thinking there is emphasis that these levels of activity are contributors to a larger whole. They could be described as contributors to a hierarchy of activity (Allen & Starr, 1982) that is social, even though this whole of which they are parts does not fit into a strict category of 'nested hierarchy'. In other words not all of the activity at the lower levels is determined by the upper levels. Freedom to act can be both enabled and constrained, and this dynamic is treated in this thesis as a property of the whole. Hence we find that a decision to proceed level by level in this thesis, but as if the levels are not fully autonomous, has implications. While narrative theory is treated in an abstract way in Part 4, some of this theory only gains its meaning in application and some takes its

starting point from the application itself. Hence there is narrative theory in Parts 3, 5, and 6 as well. Given the above it is important to emphasise that this thesis has a structure consonant with the argument advanced; that is, personal identity is a process of becoming that is in dynamic relationship with other levels of becoming.

### **1.1 Organisational Mergers and the Activity of Cultivation**

A merger is an action, that of joining-together or bringing-together-into-one. According to organisation theorists, our current understanding of action in relation to organisational contexts is underdeveloped and requires better theories (Reed, 1996; Wilmott, 1994). It is therefore appropriate to ask what the literature on mergers has to say about the action of merging two organisations into one.

'Merger' as it is used in the literature of management is rich in meaning as the language of anthropology is appropriated, and emphasis is given to a merger as a cultural event (Boockholdt & Service, 1997; Buono, Bowditch, & Lewis, 1985; Cartwright & Cooper, 1993a, 1993b, 1996; Covin & Kolenko, 1997; Covin, & Sigtler, 1996; Elsass & Veiga 1994; Ginter, Duncan, Swayne, & Shelfer, 1992; Hoare & Cartwright, 1997; Kabanoff, Waldersee & Cohen, 1995; Marks & Mirvis, 1992; McKay, 1990; Morosini, 1998; Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988; Schein, 1999; Very & Lubatkin, 1996; Walsh, 1988; Walter, 1985; Weber, 1996; Yates, 1993). A merger is construed as a marriage, and this brings with it an emphasis on organisation culture, partners, compatibility, commitment, rituals, dominance and fit. In addition the language of scientific progress adds the notions of control/prediction, and



developmental stages. Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, and Martin (1985) draw attention to this diversity of influences when they remark:

Some see the term 'organizational culture' as a metaphor—organizations are like cultures—and they try to understand the attributes of culture that might be relevant to organizations in terms of a symbolic process. Others see organizational culture as a thing, an objective entity that can be examined in terms of variables (independent and dependent) and linked to other things such as performance, satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness (p. 19).

Organisation culture is generally taken to be a system of shared meaning which is constituted by 'the way we do things around here', hence the associated notion of uniqueness; in other words it is culture that identifies an organisation as having a life of its own. When these ideas are applied to understanding mergers it is not unusual to find this argument: cross-cultural marriages are difficult and there may be survivor sickness in those who are left to carry on. There is evidence for this in both the practitioner literature and the scholarly literature. For example in the practitioner literature Boockholdt (1997) advises: "To survive a merger, you should first understand the merger partner's objectives. Then you should assess the cultures of each partner and determine which will become dominant" (p. 62). He further suggests that one be realistic in honestly appraising the strengths and weaknesses that one can bring to the new entity. "If you conclude that you will not fit, then your best survival strategy may be to leave" (Boockholdt, 1997, p. 62). The theme is one of: will this relationship work?, prompting writers like Marks and Mirvis (1992) to speak of the "importance of rituals, team building, role negotiation" (p. 21) and to suggest

“Our purpose is to provide a set of prescriptions for countering the all-too-common 'survivor sickness' that infects employees even in the best of deals" (p. 21). The fate of employees' feelings in an organisation merger is regarded as a concern, and managers are urged to attend to the importance of communication, planning and morale boosting activities as a way to maximise outcomes.

For most authors the 'merger mania' referred to in McKay (1990) is familiar and many comment on the waves of mergers that reached record levels in the 1990s. For McKay (1990) this increase in activity has brought with it a greater tendency towards the breaking of the social contract between employees and the company they work for. He laments that this trend to improve business also promotes individualism and a loss of social responsibility; he suggests that the loss, fear and mistrust experienced are manifestations of a loss of personal identity when confronted by the cold, impersonal climate of a corporate takeover. When the loss involves a commitment to and identification with a big company he contends "Lost was the spirit, the glue that bound them all together and gave meaning to their lives" (McKay, 1990, p. 1). Yates (1993) similarly suggests in the context of a merger that “personal identity, worth, and perceived security in an organization are important” (p. 1).

In the scholarly literature the metaphor of marriage is also alive and well, with Hoare and Cartwright (1997) suggesting that a solution to merger problems and incompatibility is a divorce, and other researchers speak of 'culture fit', a concept that captures how organisations may or may not be compatible partners. It is this difference in cultures that is emphasised, leading researchers to consider how employees can adapt or not adapt to the organisation transformation on the basis of

whether one or the other of two existing cultures becomes dominant in the newly merged organisation. Cartwright and Cooper (1993a, 1993b) for example argue that the two aspects, organisation culture and the impact of the merger on individuals, are likely to be inter-related, and that poor culture-fit results in fragmentation, uncertainty and cultural ambiguity which are experienced as stressful to the individuals involved.

With regard to merger studies, Cartwright and Cooper (1993b) define organisational culture as “symbols, values, ideologies, and assumptions which operate, often in an unconscious way, to guide and fashion individual and business behaviour and serve to create organizational cohesiveness” (p. 327). They further argue that culture is a collective phenomenon, because it is to some extent shared with people who live or work within the same environment, which is where they contend that it is learnt. For these researchers the core of culture is values, where these are understood to be broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others, and that act to influence behaviour. Citing Morgan (1986) in order to assert that culture is a shared sense of reality, they argue that those who do not possess a culture which is compatible, do not share the same reality and, as such, cannot therefore enact reality with each other (Cartwright & Cooper, 1996). For these authors a successful merger is one that creates a new and unitary culture acceptable to members of both the original organisations. In their studies attention is paid to the degree of culture fit between the two merging organisations as indicated by cultural integration, displacement and maintenance of cultural autonomy. As part of this they emphasise the 'impact' of the merger on individuals, as it is indicated by measures of physical health, psychological well-being and performance behaviours. They ask:

what happens to the people involved?, and they conclude that a merger is successful when the cultural similarity of the two organisations facilitates the development of a new culture.

The emphasis on culture as values that can be identified and/or measured is found in Walter (1985), who posits a conflict of human rights and property rights, and in Kabanoff, Waldersee and Cohen (1995). For the latter there is a problem of how to maintain internal cohesion whilst ensuring an economic output, and this is linked to the value patterns of individuals and the value profiles of organisations. There are also studies that seek to examine the influence of 'national culture differences' as mergers of corporations often occur across national and ethnic boundaries. Following a seminal article by Nahavandi and Malekzadeh (1988) on 'acculturative stress', Very and Lubatkin (1996) report on the presence in a merger situation of this kind of stress which they define as the "disruptive tension that is felt by members of one culture when they are required to interact with a second culture and to adopt its ways" (p. 26). Such stress is seen as a key obstacle to strategic change in mergers, and financial performance is seen as a measure of this stress. Their study concludes that there can be conflicting demands between the need for strategic direction and the importance of recognising and managing diversity. 'Identity' for Very and Lubatkin (1996) is a quality of the firm that distinguishes it from the wider context of the market. They note that their attempt to specify measurable values, however, is hampered by the finding that these are country and culture specific. Acculturation is also taken up by Elsass and Veiga (1994) who argue that this is a mode that is achieved as a function of both psychological processes and organisational or structural factors. According to

these authors the former "set up the potential for feelings of cultural differentiation" and the latter "influence the amount of required interaction and the quality of organizational integration between groups" (Elsass & Veiga, 1994, p. 431). These authors develop force-field theory to attend to the forces that influence behaviour. In this regard they are representative of an unusual study in the literature of mergers – one that seeks to account for the powerful dynamics which are at work. They argue that the opposing forces in a merger situation can be understood as an opposition of tendencies towards cultural differentiation versus organisation integration. According to these authors this dynamic yields four archetypal modes of acculturation: separation, deculturation, assimilation and acculturative tension.

The activity of merging organisations is considered in relation to communication and conflict; for example Gilmore, Shea and Useem (1997) argue that cultural transformations generate fewer unwanted side effects when top managers openly address them during the transformation process. In a study of employee attitudes post-merger, Covin and Sighetler (1996) examine the individual satisfaction with a merger, suggesting that their findings point to a loss of power on the part of employees in a firm which is acquired. They highlight the importance of attending to conflict in such situations, and they find dissatisfaction in employees from an acquired firm despite the presence of other positive factors such as improved career prospects. Like other researchers, they argue that complex operations such as mergers hinge on people issues as much as other aspects.

Cultural similarity between two merging organisations is seen to be closely related to whether people 'support' or 'fight' the changes introduced, a dynamic which

is construed in the literature through the notion of resistance as a characteristic of employees. When the cultures of the organisations are considered to be incompatible, the matching response by employees is said to be resistance (Cartwright & Cooper, 1993b).

An interest in more scientific approaches brings with it a critique of the practitioner literature as being fragmented, eclectic, United States dominated, and hypothetical/anecdotal in nature (Cartwright & Cooper, 1996), and calls for more empirical research. For example, Weber (1996) agrees that 'cultural fit' has to be adequately defined, and he calls for more rigorous empirical research to discover why "human resource difficulties" (p. 1181) are regarded as being an adverse affect on merger operations. Asking why cultural fit should influence the financial success of mergers, Weber (1996) finds that managers in a firm being acquired must have their autonomy curtailed if the merger is to prove a financial success, and that this highlights the need to pay considerable attention to cultural fit factors during the phases of a merger. This exemplifies a purpose of controlling and predicting merger outcomes, and an emphasis on measuring the success of a merger through financial analysis. For Weber (1996) success is a strong or unitary culture measured as financial health.

Like a marriage, a merger is also conceptualised as a series of phases in a change process and this brings the duration of action into view. As we saw above, Cartwright and Cooper (1993b) contend that cultural similarity between two merging organisations is an important factor influencing whether people support or fight the changes introduced, and Elsass and Veiga (1994) argue that there are various forces

to be understood in a merger event. Although a review of the extensive literature on organisational change is beyond the scope of the present research, one by Armenakis and Bedeian (1999), for the period 1990-1998, provides a useful reference. These authors structure their review around the themes of: content issues, which are mainly focused on the substance of contemporary organisational changes; contextual issues, which are defined as the forces or conditions present in an organisation's external and internal environments; process issues, which are concerned with actions undertaken during the establishment of an intended change; and criterion issues, which are about the outcomes usually evaluated in organisational change. It is their findings on change process issues that are of interest in the context of the present thesis. Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) argue that the literature on process issues is concerned with action where action is conceptualised as taking place at the levels of 'external environment', 'firm' and 'individual'. They speak of the 'impact of changes' at these levels in terms of action taken to implement changes and of "the nature of employee responses to such efforts" (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999, p. 293). Citing recent studies (Isabella, 1990; Jaffe, Scott & Tobe, 1994; Lowstedt, 1993) they argue that employees proceed through four stages during a change: denial, resistance, exploration and commitment. These are presented as 'models' of how organisation members 'construe events as change unfolds'. With respect to the literature on mergers these stages could be regarded as being similar to the modes of acculturation presented by the authors considered above.

With reference to those who use measures of financial health to assess mergers, the warning of Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) is of note:

Attention to "bottom-line" criteria alone ... is insufficient for gauging employee responses to actions undertaken during the enactment of an intended change. The actions required to implement a desired change may evoke unintended responses like denial and resistance, and further result in employees experiencing feelings of stress and cynicism, as well as reduced organizational commitment. Both research and practical experience suggest that such responses can serve as complementary criteria or markers for tracking the likelihood of employees enacting behaviors necessary for achieving desired changes (p. 293).

Speaking from a position that accords prominence to the derivation of variables (receptivity, resistance, commitment, cynicism, stress, and related personal reactions), these authors also act to aid management to predict and manage change outcomes.

Analyses of organizational change have generally tended to be limited in scope, focusing on one set of considerations or another. As we conclude the 1990s, enough research has been conducted to make it clear that future studies should evaluate content, contextual and process issues so as to make predictions about how and why organizations change (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999, p. 293).

But they also conclude that the question of how change emerges, develops, continues and terminates over time remains largely unanswered.

Here we see a convergence of the merger as marriage metaphor and the language of scientific progress; in other words the literature on organisation change



and organisation culture, and the literature on mergers, converge in terms of the purpose of the literature, which is to assist in the process of achieving satisfactory merger outcomes. This is highlighted by Hinings, Thibault, Slack and Kikulis (1996) who note that "One of the reasons for the 'discovery' of culture originated from the resistance within organizations to changes in strategy and structure" (p. 885). They suggest that it was the observed resistance at the structural and systemic level that evolved into an interest in culture. Like others they invoke a theory of culture as a system of shared values or assumptions which underpin structures and actions. Strong cultures are understood to preserve and strengthen an organisation and to facilitate the integration of individuals, and this position in turn demonstrates a desire for control on the part of managers who see the possibilities for 'making an impact' and 'intervention' that this represents. This demonstrates the influence of the language of scientific progress. Processes are regarded in mechanical terms, and 'impact' is used as a metaphor to speak of 'relationship'.

While culture compatibility has been emphasised as part of the marriage metaphor there are critics of this stance. Hinings et al. (1996) contend that there is a need to "challenge the functionalist, managerial, monolithic view, and emphasize that all organizations contain functional and occupational groups that operate from different perspectives" (p. 885); there is the lesson that "action and culture are mutually interdependent" and "culture does not 'cause' structure" (p. 885); and that researchers should try not to use the term 'culture' given that consensus on its meaning is not advanced beyond the basics. They argue that regardless of the considerable research that has been conducted on 'values', there is little consensus on

what the 'core values' could be; there is a difficulty with aligning 'individual values' with 'structural values'. They find the description of organisational culture as 'shared meanings' to be problematic, commenting:

But organizations may have a variety of shared meanings, differentiation, and ambiguity may be as common as integration. As anthropologists have pointed out for decades, culture and social structure are mutually interdependent (Meek, 1988). The literature on culture draws strong attention to the relationship between values and structures in organizations. We feel that, because of the problematic nature of the concept of culture, it is more useful to write of values and, through it, emphasize the variety of value commitments in any given organization (Hinings et al., 1996, p. 885).

Although the literature on organisational mergers is not extensive, we can summarise from it to begin an understanding of how the conditions of a merger contribute to the emergence of a new sense of self on the part of employees. The literature suggests that a merger is both a collective and a personal experience and that there are important issues of management to address. We have seen that this is mainly construed through the notion of a merger as a clash of cultures; employee resistance is understood to be related to whether a merger is a marriage of compatible cultures. Next it is possible to understand a merger in terms of an event with duration, and so we have explanations that describe the presence of stages of adjustment on the part of employees. The importance of values, espoused both at the organisational level and at the personal level, is emphasised; managers are exhorted to attend to the importance of what is valued and attempts are made to research this through

techniques of measurement. The forces present in a merger event are considered in the context of possible culture clashes and in terms of psychological stress as employees experience it. And finally the financial health of an organisation and the presence of a unitary and/or strong culture are regarded as evidence of desirable achievements. These are understood in a general sense to be related to feelings of wellbeing on the part of employees. We could also conclude from the literature, that if culture is shared meaning, then a merger disrupts both the experience of having shared meaning and the ongoing activity of making shared meaning.

The assertion that a merger is a culture collision (Schein, 1999; Walter, 1985) appears to have considerable influence on how mergers are researched. When it is assumed, through the notion of 'boundaries' (Schein, 1999), that it is an organisation's culture that is unique, that it is culture that makes the organisation identifiable (Frost et al., 1985), and that 'shared sense of meaning' is present as a quality internal to the organisation, then the larger wholes of which an organisation is a part appear to be given less prominence. Exceptions to this could be the work on the relationship of organisation to a national or ethnic group, as applied to cross-national mergers (Morosoni, 1998; Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988; Very & Lubatkin, 1996), and also the work about mergers in the finance industry (Buono et al., 1985; Cartwright & Cooper, 1993b), where some knowledge of the industry trends seems to be presupposed.

In managing organisational boundaries, the activity of merging would seem to be a strategy that is used in relation to a wider field of activity. For example we shall see in the Part 3 of this thesis that the merger of Isengate and Anessa came about as

part of 'local government amalgamations' and that there was a forced 'joining'. This gives rise to the question of who is doing the forcing as these organisations were themselves parts of a larger space of meaning. Employees may themselves be engaged in activity that is part of a larger whole, construed as that which is itself actively emergent through dynamics of activity and passivity at various levels of organisation.

In promoting a theory of organisational culture based on anthropology, Smircich (1985) argues that the main activity in 'organisation making' is 'cultivation', and that this position enables one to consider how things, events and interactions come to be meaningful. She further elaborates that the study of culture is about studying 'world-making'.

For us to see organizations in cultural terms is to understand them as symbolically constituted and sustained within a wider pattern of significance. Just as the anthropologist's task is interpreting, decoding, and deconstructing whole systems of meaning for particular groups, our task can be seen as interpreting, decoding, and deconstructing the meaning of an organization in the modern age. Just as studying culture for the anthropologist means studying world making, studying organizations can mean studying "organization making" (Smircich, 1985, p. 66).

Smircich (1985) argues that attending to the diversity of realities, positions and interpretations present in organisational practices is important; she suggests that the members of an organisation can be purposeful in their attempts to "construct or reconstitute knowledge so that events, situations and problems are confronted or

engaged from multiple points of view" (p. 71). For Smircich (1985) the question from an organisation member's perspective is 'We need to be self-conscious about what we are doing so that organizational action is enlightened action – but how?', and she argues that the answer involves attending to the activity of cultivation. As we shall see in the Part 3 of this thesis, the process of making meaning is a social process through which large social forms are achieved. Culture is such a form, but it will be argued in this thesis that other forms could be considered. While theories from anthropology could further our understanding of the human aspects of mergers, preference is given in this thesis to theories from philosophy and sociology. Rather than emphasise that cultivation is about attending to the diversity in the products or achievements, this thesis emphasises that cultivation in process terms could be about narrative making, the making of shared meaning, and the activity of positioning. But it is suggested that this move to a different emphasis could be constrained by a position that does not adequately value narrative activity as a way of achieving meaning at the levels of person, organisation and large social forms such as culture. While narrative activity is acknowledged to be present, and Cartwright and Cooper (1996) comment that "Nobody comes through the experience entirely unscathed or without a tale to tell as evidenced by the many anecdotal reminiscences which make up the folklore of a company, and regularly appear in popular management journals" (p. 5), there is no emphasis that this activity warrants our attention. Although narrative features in the research of Buono et al. (1985), who argue that a distinction is possible between culture at the social level and the indigenous culture of an organisation, it does so only to the extent that it is equated with myths. These authors

further divide indigenous culture into subjective organisational culture, which they characterise as "shared patterns of beliefs, assumptions and expectations held by organizational members" (Buono et al., 1985, p. 480), and objective organisational culture, which they characterise as "the artifacts created by an organization" (Buono et al., 1985, p. 481). They consider that in subjective culture the leadership style of the two CEOs in their study is central, and that the notions of 'heros, myths and stories' can be applied to their interviewing process.

A number of myths, i.e., narratives, which organize beliefs about the organization and its value system, also characterized life in these organizations. .... [S]uch perceptions can develop when something that is part of the objective situation begins to take on a life of its own and becomes a distorted magnification of the actual situation (Buono et al., 1985, p. 487).

Narrative is taken to be related to the notion of culture, but only to the extent that 'myths' are equated to the meaning 'not real'. In other words it is implied that during a merger the narratives made cannot be contributions to what is really happening; the process of making new narratives is peripheral to the activity of making a cultural adjustment to an emergent situation. This is not unexpected given the denigration of narrative as a discourse form, a position that is achieved as part of ongoing efforts to position the sciences as being privileged in opposition to the humanities (Gare, 1996).

In this section it has been possible to argue that we have not given prominence to how narrative activity contributes to processes of self-organisation during a merger, and that our accounts of this are therefore inadequate. This is not unexpected, because as we shall see, there is an increasing interest in narrative ideas (Barry &

Elmes, 1997; Boje, 1991, 1995, 1999; Brown, 1998; Calas & Smircich, 1999; Czarniawska, 1997a, 1997b; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1995; Drummond, 1998; Jones, 1998, 2001; O'Connor, 1997, 2000; Pentland, 1999; Pitt, 1998; Reissman 1993; Stevenson & Greenberg, 1998), but so far this is not adequately integrated with the call for better theories of action to be developed in management studies (Reed, 1996; Wilmott, 1994) and nor is it linked to developments in process philosophy with its attempts to ensure "the development of abstractions which allow us to understand the immanent dynamics, intrinsic significance and the diversity of processes participating in the creative becoming of the world, including ourselves" (Gare, in press – a, p. 31). This thesis, however, makes an attempt to better integrate narrative ideas with a call for better theories of action, and thereby goes some way towards closing the gap in our accounts and furthering a new direction of inquiry.

## **1.2 Narrative Activity and Management Studies**

So far in this part consideration has been given to the literature on mergers, and we have noted how an either/or path tends to be taken in regard to organisation culture; that is, culture is either construed as a product or as a process. It is also possible to consider how another part of the literature of management studies could enable this inquiry about narrative activity to proceed; this part is concerned with how narrative ideas are being incorporated into management studies. It is to this that we can now turn, being mindful that the purpose of considering narrative activity, which is central to the research question being asked in this thesis, could be both

enabled and constrained according to how the literature itself approaches narrative ideas.

The use of 'stories' in the English language literature of management and management contexts is not new, and nor has it been widespread (Hansen & Kahnweiler, 1993; Mitroff & Kilmann, 1975; Phillips, 1995). But in recent years there has been a growing interest in narrative ideas. Works from psychology, literary studies, and ethnography, such as those by Polkinghorne, (1988), J. Bruner (1986, 1990), Jameson (1981), Sarbin (1982), Spence (1982), E. M. Bruner (1986), White (1981, 1987), Barthes (1977), Hardy (1975), Rorty (1989), Freeman (1993), and Kerby (1991), have without doubt contributed to this interest. In the spirit of the rationality/integration/market position (Reed, 1996), narrative analysis is being adopted (Brown, 1998; O'Connor, 1997, 2000; Pentland, 1999; Pitt, 1998; Stevenson & Greenberg, 1998) along with works which advocate narrative analysis as a methodology (Czarniawska, 1997b; Reissman 1993). On the power/knowledge/justice side (Reed, 1996) narrative is invoked in a postmodern stance (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Boje, 1991, 1995, 1999; Czarniawska, 1997a; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1995; Rhodes, 2000). Some authors invoke narrative ideas in a manner that suggests new possibilities; these are opened up by a process of questioning what lies beyond a deconstructive postmodern stance (Clegg & Hardy, 1996; Drummond, 1998; Jones, 1998, 2001; Johnson, 1999; Reed, 1996; White, 1992).

A theory combination that concentrates on narrative activity as well as the products of this activity, and then takes this as a starting point to bring in social



theory (Bourdieu, 1998b), could incorporate some of the contributions on narrative ideas that we see in management studies. Because there is an emphasis on persons as processes of becoming, process thought could provide the conditions in which a new theory with greater explanatory power could emerge.

While a constructive postmodern position (Griffin, 1993), such as process thought, awaits full development in management studies, the increased interest in narrative ideas could contribute to this development being emergent. Calas and Smircich (1999) for example, while not clearly designating narrative ideas as a way forward beyond deconstructive postmodernism, do note the developments in narrative and hint at this direction with their comment that stories can be presented alongside theories and propositions intended to be tested. Clegg and Hardy (1996) are more definite when they highlight the importance of narrative in their conclusion to the Handbook of organisation studies:

To be responsive to new narratives is important in research because narratives produce identities: as stories are elaborated, persons are coopted into identities they did not author and cannot transform. So, narratives are political in that they establish positions from which persons must speak and from which consequences in the material world flow (p. 696).

This contribution is of interest because it points to the importance of constraints that could be operational on the capacity to author and transform narratives.

Weick (2001) is an example of an author who both takes a position in the literature that organisation culture is about making shared meaning, and makes the connection that stories are important to culture:

Culture coordinates action at a distance by several symbolic means, and one that seems of particular importance is the use of stories. Stories remind people of key values on which they are centralized. When people share the same stories those stories provide general guidelines within which they can customize diagnoses and solutions to local problems.

Stories are important, not just because they coordinate, but also because they register, summarize, and allow reconstruction of scenarios that are too complex for logical linear summaries to preserve. Stories hold the potential to enhance requisite variety among human actors, and that's why high reliability systems may handicap themselves when they become preoccupied with traditional rationality and fail to recognize the power of narrative rationality (p. 341).

This however makes an account of 'ordering' in a manner that we saw critiqued above by Allen and Starr (1982). That is, there is an emphasis on organisation in positive terms as a series of connections that is rational; for example the activity of 'sharing' the same stories is emphasised. Nevertheless an extension of this particular idea could be to give prominence to the emergent properties of narratives and the narrative-making process as a series of constraints. We could consider the process whereby stories as products are 'reconstructed' and how this leads to characters and readers being constrained to passivity. At the level of the

process itself we could ask about how productivity forms the conditions in which new narratives could be achieved.

But according to hierarchy theory (Allen & Starr, 1982), Weick (2001) can also be critiqued at another level. Because the development of such narrative ideas in management studies could be constrained according to how we position them, an explanation that positions stories as products subordinate to organisation culture remains thin in regard to its explanatory power unless it seeks to account for the process of narrative making and how this process is an influence at the various levels of narrative productivity, including culture. That is, narrative activity that is occurring at levels higher in the hierarchy is an influence on the formation of 'the organisation', and as well 'the organisation' acts back to be a formative influence on narrative activity that is ongoing at other levels of activity. According to the theories in this thesis, Weick's explanation must be regarded as partial, as it fails to account adequately for the complexity present in narrative operations, and how these are central to the process of making shared meaning through the operation of language, social spaces, tradition, and culture.

Weick (2001) also positions his work in cognitive psychology and an emphasis on sense making as enactment, but he does not invoke authors such as Carr (1986) to develop the important connection between action and narrative. Through cognitive psychology a distinction is made that certain knowledge is acquired through activity, and this knowledge could be of a kind that is not capable of being verbally expressed at the level of activity that is person; for example we learn to ride a bike or drive a car, but we learn these activities by 'doing'. By bringing in Carr's (1986)

contribution, process philosophy could have a response to make to Weick (2001), but further consideration of this is beyond the scope of this thesis, as it would require considerable research in its own right. Suffice to say that both narrative theory (Carr, 1986; MacIntyre, 1981; Ricoeur, 1984) and social theory (Bourdieu, 1998b) emphasise that language exists as a system that enables action to be taken, and that narrative is a central form of discourse that enables meaningful order to be achieved. This emphasis, also espoused in this thesis, is not apparent in Weick (2001), even though psychologists such as J. Bruner (1986, 1990) have also explored these ideas.

Nevertheless before leaving Weick (2001), we should note that in regard to identity, but unlike Ricoeur and Bourdieu, he gives prominence to the notions of the "boundaryless career" and the "boundarless organization" (p. 209). From the position espoused in this thesis, this idea of a boundaryless career is tenable only as a form of a claim that an agent makes in relation to a field or a society, because given what is said above about constraints, and their capacity to enable order to be present, it seems unlikely that such a claim would go unchallenged. It would for example be subjected, in the spirit of dialogue, to a constraint that takes the form of a counter-argument. (Note that we shall see below that any counter-argument is likely to be made in the narrative form of discourse (MacIntyre, 1981), but Weick (2001) does not address this). This claim would be an attempt to achieve a position for a personal or collective story, such that action is enabled. In other words one might argue than one can work anywhere in a field, or even move to other fields, and because there are no borders one is unconstrained. But given the contribution of Bourdieu (1998), that we see in Part 3 of this thesis, such a claim should be submitted to doubt as Bourdieu's work

demonstrates that fields of action are achieved through the operation of a dynamic of both forces and struggle. One can make the claim; of that there is no doubt because the very existence of an ongoing argument at the level of the field enables the claim itself to be made. But as we shall see below, this claim may rely on a position that favours another argument; that is, the argument that markets too must be unconstrained in relation to society. Possibly this is the source of Weick's assertion, but as part of narrative operations any agent could ask whose interest such a position serves. Employees may have some freedom to pursue a career across different organisations, but according to hierarchy theory (Allen & Starr, 1982) this activity may be supported only *because* there are constraints in operation at higher levels. To further refine this example, it may be claimed that managers have management capability regardless of their professional allegiance, and that consonant with this is an opening up of possibilities for a particular employee or a collective. However this action is also a source of constraint; some professions may have the power to make more adequate claims on the part of their members than other professions. As argued by Allen and Starr (1982) this could be more to do with there being differing levels of constraint that operate in relation to each other, than it has to do with there being no constraints in the form of 'boundaries'. As we saw above, Allen and Starr (1982) argue that components in systems may contribute to the ordering process not because of what they do but rather because of what they are not allowed to do. Professions for example place ethical constraints on their members and the higher levels of activity, construed as 'society', are not the only beneficiaries of this activity. The credibility of an individual professional is constrained to some extent through her professional

affiliation, but this is also what enables her to act. Taking a similar line in this direction enables us to see that the making of shared meaning may involve the activity of 'sharing' as this is posited by Weick, but that we could also ask about the extent to which an employee is constrained from sharing and how this is operational in a merger event. The question of how narratives, once achieved in the form of the 'stories' that Weick refers to, constrain this kind of sharing, could be difficult to ask, if in turn our theories about 'stories' are thin and constrained themselves to Weick's (2001) position on narrative theory. Unlike Ricoeur, Weick does not give prominence to the language form of narrative and how narrative operates to enable persons to take action in relation to questions on 'who', 'what', 'how' and so on.

We see here that 'stories' are invoked in the literature of management; their importance is at least acknowledged. This extended example shows how the critique of this could develop according to process thought. The main point to make is that if we treat stories only as products with certain characteristics, then we are liable to misconstrue their potentiality in regard to a process of narrative making. A similar critique is possible in relation to some of the other contributions on narrative ideas that we find in the English language literature of management.

In a recent work O'Connor (2000) suggests that the notion of an 'embedded narrative' is of use in order to understand "the complexity and dynamics of organizational change" (p. 1). She argues that stories at the organisational level have links into stories at other levels, even the universal level, and that this contributes to our understanding of the context in which organisations operate. Again this approach accords narratives with the qualities of parts, but gives less emphasis to their capacity

to be simultaneously evolving alongside narrative making at higher or larger levels of activity.

Czarniawska (1997a, 1997b; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1995) is a major contributor, but in her work she gives prominence to 'action nets' as products. She perhaps moves to a more sophisticated conception of 'product', but gives emphasis at this level to the genres of drama and autobiography, and rather than address activity/passivity seems to be most concerned to elaborate on the opposition 'fiction/non-fiction'. Perhaps this is an attempt to counter the denigration of narrative that occurred as part of the emergence of scientific materialism (Gare, 1996). Whilst this concern is to some extent shared in this thesis, there is also an agreement with Gare (1996) that better abstractions are required if a successful counter position is to be found to modernism. The line of thought that could link Schelling (1800/1978) and Allen and Starr (1982) is regarded in this thesis as a better way to proceed. According to this direction 'fiction' is a quality of a product, and it is argued that consideration of productivity in an abstract sense enables the dynamics to be given prominence, and the ethical judgement about what is produced to be seen as a property of the process.

Barry and Elmes (1997) take a similar course when they set out to explore strategic management as a form of fiction. While acknowledging that narratives have life-like qualities such as a capacity to change, and agents who are engaged in reading, these authors seem to raise many questions that beg an even larger question. That is, inherent to their contribution is a call for a more adequate theory to be developed regarding narrative activity. A commitment to social constructionism, coupled with a desire to build on the work of deconstructive postmodernist thinkers

such as Boje (1991, 1995), is the position espoused. While the process thought direction advocated in this thesis may be a response that could encompass these developments, and this is briefly addressed below, it is sufficient for my purpose that their article does raise some common concerns. For example Barry and Elmes (1997) can be seen to ask many questions that could be addressed using the narrative theorists Ricoeur, Carr and MacIntyre, but these authors are not invoked by them. Nevertheless I agree with Barry and Elmes (1997) that questions of authorship, ordering, plots, voice, and epics could be of concern in management studies. Again though it is important to emphasise that the centrality of activity/passivity could be given prominence in regard to these questions.

On the basis of the above it is suggested that contributions that emphasise a fiction/non-fiction dynamic, and/or analysis of narratives as products already achieved are not useful for my purpose. Those that emphasise the presence of polyphony, ongoing storylines, embeddedness, and powers of authors/readers are pointing to properties of systems and these are enabled to exist because there are constraints in operation. This attention to the activity/passivity dynamic takes the theory building process, as a kind of narrative making, into a trajectory whereby more adequate explanations could be achieved. As we shall see below these could posit the importance of narrative as a human activity that enables a 'both/and' (Bourdieu, 1998b) approach to be taken towards oppositions such as fiction/fact, objective/subjective, and activity/passivity.

Drummond (1996, 1998) is of particular interest because he advocates a theoretical stance drawn from the work of the narrative theorists in philosophy (Carr,



1986; MacIntyre, 1981; Ricoeur, 1984). Furthermore, he combines this with the social theory of Bourdieu in order to examine the relationship between culture, leadership, conflict and change. In the context of English language articles in management studies, this work is notable because Ricoeur's recent work is not widely appropriated (Adams, 1993; Leflaive, 1996; Mercier, 1994; O'Connor, 1995). MacIntyre is cited by O'Connor (1997) and Townley (1999), and Bourdieu by Oakes, Townley and Cooper (1998), and by Tsoukas (1996). But the synthesis of these authors as it is achieved by Drummond, and appropriated in this study, is new. Drummond follows the lead of Gare (1993, 1995, 1996), who argues for the development of process philosophy in order to reverse the devaluing of narrative which has occurred in many fields. Gare (1996) argues that we can conceive of people and communities through stories as processes, thus making the link from narrative to a stance of constructive postmodernism (Gare, in press-a).

Given the above, it is appropriate to question how this thesis is situated in regard to the tradition of readings that is management studies. While Reed (1996) describes the debate in management studies as 'rationalism' versus those who are against this position, for my purposes this is consonant with the description of Gare (in-press a) who posits that the difference between modernism and postmodernism can be characterised in the following way. Modernity is a civilisation formed through the agency of scientific materialism and it is modernity that now dominates the globe. The counter tradition to this movement takes the subject as the point of departure rather than nature, hence the emphasis is to explain nature as a human or social construct. Postmodernism, as a position which rejects modernism and the society

formed through it, emerged at the end of the Eighteenth century and the beginning of the Nineteenth century.

The question of what constitutes truth is regarded as central to the modernism/postmodernism debate. The modernist stance on truth relies on the belief that what is manifested to us in the world is the result of objective underlying structures which operate according to universal laws and it is the task of the interpreter to uncover or discover those laws. For this stance truth is something that is 'out there', a foundation or essential truth which is knowable. As part of this approach it is believed that the language in a text has a stable meaning that a reader can find, a truth that represents what the author of the text intends. In other words for a word or a text there is a meaning which captures within the signifier what is signified. By contrast, deconstructive postmodernists (who are akin to some 'poststructuralists') are representative of the other pole in Reed's narrative analysis, and argue that there is no invariant relationship between the signified and the signifier. Derrida (1973), for example, argues that all signifieds are a signifier for something else, and that if one seeks to find the meaning and pin it down, all that can be found is other signifieds and signifiers. Such a position denies the existence of stable meaning within language, because it is argued that signifieds and signifiers are constantly breaking up and reattaching themselves in new ways; methods of deconstruction demonstrate that a text has multiple meanings. Whilst deconstructive postmodernists do not deny the existence of knowledge, they argue that any new interpretation can be brought to bear on a text and that knowledge therefore is only a temporary achievement as part of this process of interpretation. As Sarup (1988) argues:

One of the ruling illusions of Western metaphysics is that reason can somehow grasp the world without a close attention to language and arrive at a pure, self-authenticating truth or method. Derrida's work draws attention to the ways in which language deflects the philosopher's project (p. 57).

While the modernist account of truth presents us with the problem of invariant meaning, the deconstructive postmodernist account presents us with ever shifting meaning and possible relativism; for such a position truth is always relative to context. According to Bernstein (1986) this debate, when described as the opposition between objectivism and relativism, has "become almost obsessive" and has "spread to every area of human inquiry and life" (p. 15).

With regard to the emergence of narrative identity neither the modern nor the deconstructive postmodern position is helpful unless we can account adequately for the existence of purpose. Not only does the process of identity-making occur within a social context, as we shall see, but a person must also be able to make the account 'I exist, and that is true' or 'It's me here', without recourse to the usual verification that is required in a modernist sense. In a practical sense one cannot step outside of one's own existence beyond the kind of positioning and the active use of imagination that we shall see described below. While the living out of an identity is experienced as a subjective process, the account made can be objective, and it is the crucial process that enables the synthesis that is real for a person. But we also, as part of this personal truth, must allow for a dynamic with what can be regarded as the process of making a communal truth, construed here as a narrative account of a community. The conditions for our project of identity are the dynamics of different worlds, including,

but not restricted to, our own. There is a kind of truth in this as a process, a process in which a product is achievable, which we shall see described in this thesis through narrative ideas as the capacity to achieve an adequate account of a life.

In management studies, Calas and Smircich (1999) suggest that it is time to look beyond 'postmodernism', which they define as a group of perspectives sharing a concern with language and representation and a reconsideration of subjectivity and power, their definition of 'postmodernism' again being consonant with Reed's (1996) 'power/knowledge/justice' pole. Like other authors, for example Newton (1998), Calas and Smircich (1999) are critical of Foucauldian approaches which they argue fail to engender "'solid ground' from which to speak" (p. 415). In philosophy, Ricoeur's (1998) argument that the 'linguistic turn' was an important and necessary development, is similar to the position of Calas and Smircich (1999) when they suggest that while the postmodernist turn was desirable it may no longer be appropriate as an application in management studies. "How are the issues of representation and form implicated in sustaining the power relations behind our theories and our institutions? As we see it, finding ways to answer this question represents important work that we all can do past postmodernism" (Calas & Smircich, 1999, p. 17). In this argument what appears to be operative is a critique of the 'deconstructionist' versions of postmodernism.

In a recent work Gare (in press-a), in philosophy, agrees with Griffin (1993) that there are two kinds of postmodernism which have developed in opposition to modernism: a deconstructive or eliminative postmodernism (which is also associated with poststructuralism) and a constructive postmodernism (which is associated with

process philosophy). According to Gare both of these cultural movements have been inspired by philosophies which can be understood as having resonances with each other and he argues that there is a submerged tradition to which they both belong, one encompassing both radical and idealist alternatives. Gare argues that the work of Schelling (1775-1854) can be used to trace the divergence into deconstructive postmodernism and constructive postmodernism, but more importantly that we can appreciate the coherence of a position which opposes modernity and which incorporates within it both the process philosophy and deconstructionist (poststructuralist) positions. In Schelling's philosophy nature is conceived as 'activity', that is as simultaneity of 'productivity' (or process) and 'products' (1800/1978). As Gare (in press-a) argues "Without productivity, there could be no products, and without products, there could be no productivity. This productivity consists in opposed activities limiting each other" (p. 6). 'Nature' is thus construed as 'opposed activities', and 'self-constitution' and 'self-organisation' are then construed as the primal ground of all reality.

Gare (in press-a) posits that the work of Alfred North Whitehead enables the bridging of these two lines of development that began in the work of Schelling.

Upholding metaphysics as construed by Whitehead is not to privilege a particular discourse. It is to uphold a discourse which enables people to question and attempt to replace the abstractions which presently dominate civilization. What we now need is the development of abstractions which allow us to understand the immanent dynamics, intrinsic significance and the diversity of processes participating in the creative becoming of the world,

including ourselves. This is a condition not only for an effective opposition to the destructive imperatives of modernity. It is the condition for overcoming it (p. 31).

According to Gare (in-press b) living organisms, such as persons and communities, have a complexity that makes it difficult to maintain a state of indifference with respect to changes in their environment. Such organisms must therefore form and reform themselves as products, a dynamic which is construed in this thesis in terms of the emergent nature of self and the achievement of narrative identity.

With regard to a philosophical position capable of accounting for this Griffin (1993) argues:

Going beyond the modern world will involve transcending its individualism, anthropocentrism, patriarchy, mechanization, economism, consumerism, nationalism, and militarism. Constructive postmodern thought provides support for the ecology, peace, feminist, and other emancipatory movements of our time, while stressing that the inclusive emancipation must be from modernity itself. The term *postmodern*, however, by contrast with *premodern*, emphasizes that the modern world has produced unparalleled advances that must not be lost in a general revulsion against its negative features (p. ix).

He argues that part of this project is to salvage a positive meaning for the notion of human self. This thesis is in accord with these ideas, and the work of Gare; the purpose is to contribute to, or 'stand with', a process philosophy position and a

possible direction that would see development of a constructive postmodernist counter-tradition in management studies.

With regard to the literature of mergers prominence is given to the notion of organisational culture, where culture shapes the objective conditions in which people find themselves. But we have also seen that the lack of attention to 'people issues' prompts these authors to call for more empirical research in the modernist stance. It is argued here that our understanding of the lived experience of a merger could be enhanced beyond the stance taken in the current literature. The activity of persons, for example the presence of resistance by employees towards merger decisions, could be construed in a way that is consonant with a constructive postmodern stance, whereby the capacity to take action is brought into central consideration. This contrasts with those presuppositions in the literature on mergers that foster a separation between person and organisation and fail to appreciate the co-creative nature of the organisation/person dynamic. While Frost et al. (1985) suggest that 'organisational culture' is either treated as a symbolic process or as a 'thing', or objective entity, in the literature on mergers it would seem that the latter is more prevalent in current research. This could explain the call for more attention to 'people issues' in merger situations. Both symbolic processes and 'things' could be involved in the lived experience of a merger and emphasis could be given to the larger processes of which these could be a part.

With regard to an understanding of 'action' in management studies, Reed (1996) argues that there is a need to develop explanatory theories in which "agency derives from the simultaneously enabling and contradictory nature of the structural

principles by which people act" (p. 46) and that this constitutes one of the central issues on the research agenda for organisation studies. Clegg and Hardy (1996) similarly argue "To understand how (the subject) is constituted and created in this world of uncertainties is not to claim victim status ... but to show the possibilities for action" and "Bringing ... agency back into focus does matter in organization studies" (p. 697). In finding a Foucauldian account of organisation studies wanting, Newton (1998) argues:

We have seen from feminist work ... people still need to actively work through the contradictions between their individual sense of themselves and their allegiance to discursive positions ...(this) can perhaps only be analyzed through a theoretical account which positions a changing subject within the context of changing discursive and 'material' relations. Developing such an account remains an impossibility within current Foucauldian readings because they appear unable to 'give life' to active subjects (p. 415).

With respect to action and identity, Wilmott (1994) contends that the dualism currently forced between agency (considered as subject) and structure (considered as object) could be overcome. He makes the case that recent work points in a direction which could "open up a space for such a project" (Wilmott, 1994, p. 89). According to Wilmott (1994) the humanist claim that persons are autonomous and self-determining would be submitted to radical doubt through 'posthumanist' deconstruction where 'human agency' refers to the "*open, reflective and intentional* quality of human beings" (p. 91). It is this openness of being that he argues has implications for the "(re)production and transformation of organizational practices"



(Wilmott, 1994, p. 101). Considered in this way, deconstructive postmodernism can be construed as having opened a space in which a theory of action could emerge through constructive postmodernism.

It is also notable that an interest in identity making as activity is present in management studies. Albert, Blake, Ashforth and Dutton (2000) suggest that in postindustrial times "... there is a need not just for self-discovery but self-invention, and possibly reinvention" (p. 13).

As we shall see below both the narrative theorists (Ricoeur, Carr and MacIntyre), and Bourdieu, as a social theorist, strive to make a place for action in our thinking by finding a position which takes into account a both/and position with regard to objectivism and subjectivism. As Bourdieu (1998b) describes it:

This philosophy of action asserts itself from the outset by breaking with a number of established notions which have been introduced in scholarly discourse without examination ("subject," "motivation," "actor," "role," etc.) and with a whole series of socially powerful oppositions – individual/society, individual/collective, conscious/unconscious, interested/disinterested, objective/subjective, and so forth – which seem to constitute ordinary thought (p. viii).

Action is a central concern in the projects of Ricoeur and Bourdieu. Ricoeur (1998) has stated that his project is about language, action and narrative identity, and that the single problem of his reflections has been creativity (Kearney, 1988). Furthermore his work demonstrates the use of the hermeneutical methodology which he advocates, a

process whereby he sets out to engage in one movement what are seemingly disparate positions in the various philosophical debates, for example he discusses at length the positions of structuralism and phenomenology (Ricoeur, 1974a). He has consistently shown that such positions, when approached from a larger context, are really positions in a conversation or dialogue and that the polarisation is only apparent until it is overcome by attending to the relationship between them. When he speaks of action in his writing he demonstrates through the continuation of this dialectical approach that the relationship of agency to suffering is a primary theme in our understanding of human reality (Ricoeur, 1998). Ricoeur contributes a theory of the social imaginary through his explorations of metaphor and narrative, but even prior to these studies he explored the relationship between imagination and what he argues is the fragile point where the voluntary and the involuntary meet. This exploration is part of a bid to develop a philosophy of the creative imagination that would facilitate a productive dialogue between philosophy and the social sciences. In Ricoeur's project creativity is understood at the level of semantic innovation and practical representation, at the individual level, and at the cultural/social level. By considering language as discourse, the realisation of discourse as structured work, the relation of speaking to writing, the work of discourse as a projection of a world, and discourse and work as a mediator of self-understanding, he manages to bring within one grasp the hermeneutic levels which are important to semantic creativity – those of symbol, words, text, narrative and action. Pellauer (1997) notes that from the earliest writing in Ricoeur's project "This concern for action, its possibility, and its intelligibility – for meaningful action – is a central strand that runs throughout all Ricoeur's subsequent

work" (p. ix), and Reagan (1995) contributes "...Ricoeur argues that there is a close analogy between the characteristics of texts and action such that the social sciences could—and should—adopt the methodology of text-interpretation in order to understand human action" (p. 333). Furthermore, we shall see in the following that both Carr (1986) and MacIntyre (1977, 1981) are narrative theorists who also have a primary concern with narrative activity in their research.

Bourdieu similarly attests to a concern with action when he states that his project has two "elementary" or "fundamental" characteristics. Firstly he says there is in his work a "philosophy of science" that is relational, in other words it accords primacy to relations. Secondly he says that his project is a "philosophy of action" (Bourdieu, 1998b). The latter he designates as "positional" because it "notes the potentialities inscribed in the body of agents and in the structure of the situations where they act or, more precisely, in the relations between them" (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. vii). Bourdieu also turns his attention to the dialectic of agency/suffering at the level of what he calls social spaces. By attending to the importance of field, in the sense of field of action, Bourdieu is able to argue that such a social space is both a field of forces and a field of struggle. On this basis, the act of synthesis that brings the work of Bourdieu together with the narrative theorists Ricoeur, Carr and MacIntyre (Drummond, 1996, 1998; Gare, 1995, 1996) is consistent with a constructive postmodern stance of process philosophy as this is posited by Gare (in press-a, in press-b). (Note that Bourdieu (1998b) says that his use of the term 'philosophy' is in accordance with common usage; he does not associate this use with the practice of philosophy as such).

While considerable attention is paid to 'cultivation' (that is, in anthropological terms, how things, events, and interactions come to be meaningful) in the literature on mergers, and less to narrative activity, it is argued that this nevertheless provides an opening for a different approach. This different approach could bring together narrative theory and social theory, and it could begin with the emphasis that a sense of shared meaning is an achievement (or product) which comes about through social practices (or processes) that are involved in the activity of 'making shared meaning'. These practices can be said to be operational at both the level of organisation which is 'the organisation' and at the levels of social practice to which an organisation can be said to belong. In other words it is appropriate to begin with the idea that Solmarco, the new organisation being formed, has a dynamic relationship with a larger whole. At this level it will be argued in this thesis that 'language' (Ricoeur, 1976a, 1989, 1995a), 'tradition' (MacIntyre, 1981), 'social space' (Bourdieu, 1998b), and 'culture' (Gare, 1996; Honneth, 1996) can be understood as being actively emergent, that is 'living', and contributing the conditions for shared meaning to be achieved at the level of organisation which is 'the organisation'. This is relevant to this thesis, and will be elaborated in Part 3, because it will be argued that the process of narrating an identity is not wholly limited to the level of organisation that is 'personal'. While productivity is characteristic of different levels of organising activity there is also simultaneity of productivity in which activity and passivity mutually limit each other (Schelling, 1800/1978). That is, if we are to consider how the employees of Anessa and Isengate came to be positioned as 'passive characters' in the State Government's narrative of local government reform, in such a way that this spoke to their sense of

self, we must first account for simultaneity of productivity. Therefore the next move in this thesis is to consider how both Solmarco and the employees are part of the larger ongoing argument over what it means to provide a public service. It will be posited that this argument is a living process of interpretation that forms the conditions in which new interpretations can be achieved.

It is concluded from the above that while the literature on mergers does suggest that the activity of cultivation warrants our attention, nevertheless there could be more encouragement for researchers and practitioners to give greater prominence to narrative activity. It is suggested that the question asked in this thesis has not, to date, been adequately addressed, and that narrative activity is yet to receive serious attention in relation to the emergent nature of self at a time of organisational merger.

While the literature on mergers is considered above, and this thesis does contribute to management studies in regard to this literature, it is important to note that the intention in this thesis is to give prominence to employees as processes of becoming. Given this emphasis, the thesis could have been about any major organisational transformation.

So far in this thesis the following has been proposed: that we ask about narrative activity in a merger and how this activity contributes to the emergence of a new sense of self for employees. It is suggested, in the spirit of exploration, that a fresh approach, involving a synthesis of narrative theory with social theory, would benefit this inquiry and add to existing ideas about the activity of cultivation. It is argued that this synthesis is appropriate given that narrative activity could be accorded more serious attention in the literature on mergers, and that furthermore

such a move could be linked to the calls for better theories of action as these are currently apparent in management studies.

## **Part 2 A Position for this Thesis: Methodological Considerations**

As the employees are the people of interest in this thesis, and it is their activity that will be considered as central, some guidance about the methodology used is appropriate at this early stage of writing. It is important to say that there are questions of methodology in this thesis that relate not just to the collection of data, and how this is presented. There are questions that relate to authorship on my part and the decisions that I make, and to reading on the part of those who engage with the thesis as a text that takes a form that is submitted for examination. In effect, at the level of the whole text, this thesis is a kind of narrative achievement that exists not only as a synthesis of parts (interviews, texts, theory, and explanation of methodology used), but also as an action or ‘doing’, inside of which the reader evolves in the activity of reading (Ricoeur, 1984); this is consistent with Ricoeur’s definition of narrative as a process of invention which brings together goals, causes, and chance within a temporal unity that forms a new congruence in the organisation of events. Therefore it is acknowledged that this early elaboration of methodology could present a difficulty for some readers.

It must be posited, following the appropriation of a theory of reading in Part 4, that the readers of this thesis, its author and the employees/informants are all engaged in similar activities. While this thesis is my account, there is incorporation of the narrative activity of informants as seen in their interviews, and of the State Government as achieved in their reports and debates. But the activity of reading the thesis engages the reader in another, and new, synthesis according to Ricoeur (1984).

This is relevant and will be central to the theory appropriation offered to the reader below, but it is important to note that this explanation regarding method has more than one purpose. It not only provides guidance for the reader about what to expect, but also stands as an early version of the theory developments achieved in the parts of the thesis that follow. In other words we should be mindful that this methodology part is somewhat dependent for its meaning on the theory developments undertaken below.

The narrative quality of this thesis rests on the adequacy of the account achieved in answer to the research question; that is, the question asks how narrative activity is formative in the lived experience of an organisational merger and how this contributes to the emergence of a new sense of self for an employee. Below there is a consideration of the process of narrative making on my part, a consideration of what makes a narrative account stand up to scrutiny, and a description of how this forms a text that contributes to the tradition of readings identified as 'management studies' and described above in regard to the literature on mergers. Simply explained, the method employed involves narrative making. A narrative, in the form of a thesis, is achieved and this is a synthesis of story parts that were generated through interviews with selected informants who worked in the two organisations, Anessa and Isengate, at the time of the merger. Further integration is achieved with specified texts and with theories, in particular those that are about narrative ideas. It is appropriate to say that what is achieved here is a text in narrative form, which is authored from a position external to the organisations concerned, and which takes on a life of its own. While this is the case with most studies, what the theory requires in this thesis is attention to



the hermeneutic process used to arrive at this achievement, not just an emphasis on the resulting text. For this reason, and as elaborated below, certain methodological positions which could have been taken become unjustifiable, because the theory adopted has clear implications for how the thesis is achieved. Keeping this in mind, it is my purpose in this part to describe some of the methodological and epistemological considerations that inform the present research.

## **2.1 Theoretical Context**

In terms of human experience events as they happen are discordant, and while such experience has some narrative quality in the sense described by Carr (1986), a fully formed story is not considered to be present as events unfold in the context of that experience (MacIntyre, 1981). Therefore human life as we experience it is a story in a nascent state, and we shall see below that this leads Ricoeur (1991g) to speak of the 'pre-narrative structure of experience'.

Starting from the position that what is present in the merger is both an 'untold story' (Ricoeur, 1991g) and many possible stories, it will be seen that the narrative presented draws on in-depth interviews with informants supported by other textual sources such as government reports and debates. These sources can be characterised as a number of what Ricoeur calls 'story fragments' (Ricoeur, 1991g). This concept of story fragments is appropriate as a description of those sources used in the composition of the narrative presented herein. For example the interview undertaken for this research with the former CEO of Isengate includes the following:

Ki – Some would say that I devolved things and others would say that I got involved in a lot of the detail and I did. And I played both of those roles. I mean there were times when I would get involved in the detail and make sure that people actually turned down that track and when I saw them running down the track I wanted, I'd leave them to it and I'd get some other stubborn people ... (Interview with Ki, January 1995, p. 6).

This fragment has within it a kind of unity, conveying meaning about how this person provides leadership through a diversity of styles, and what the relationship between these styles could be, given that the reference to others in the organisation is included. When brought together, or emplotted, with other similar fragments a narrative can be composed, and we shall see in the following that narration is an integrating process. "By integrating process I mean the work of composition which gives a dynamic identity to the story recounted: what is recounted is a particular story, one and complete in itself" (Ricoeur, 1991g, p. 21).

I propose to take Ricoeur's description of 'story fragment' to be 'part' as in 'part of a possible story'. The narrative offered in this thesis creates a unity out of multiple incidents and parts, with the purpose of recounting a story that makes sense as an intelligible whole. Making such an account or synthesis has two additional dimensions according to Ricoeur. Firstly the narrative brings concordance to what is otherwise discordant (Ricoeur, 1991g), so for example both those who act and those who are acted upon are considered as part of the whole. Secondly there is a synthesis of time in the sense that my act of narration integrates temporally discrete incidents; the story has a beginning, middle and end, and closure is effected even though the

narrative could have gone on or could have started from a different point. To use Ricoeur's description, I draw a configuration out of a succession (Ricoeur, 1991g).

Given the theoretical synthesis achieved below it is important to acknowledge my own position as an author and how this position can to some extent be opened to scrutiny. First there is no intention on my part to assert that there is one true story of what happened in the merger and that this story can be told from a neutral position. There is also no claim that the findings can be replicated or generalised. Rather, what is configured is a narrative based on the events, a narrative which is an invitation to readers to engage in a reading experience that could contribute to an understanding of personal and organisational transformation and the lived experience of such transformation. It is envisaged that this narrative could resonate with the experience of others in similar situations. In making this contention, I align myself with Paul Ricoeur when he argues that no narratives can be neutral (Ricoeur, 1984), thus moving away from any presupposition that we can position ourselves outside of human reality construed as a practical field of action. Unlike Lee (1999), who argues "Through the extraction and rearrangement of relevant text, a more continuous, coherent, integrative, and engaging single story can be recovered" (p. 92), no claim is made that there is a reality already present to be recovered. I am also in accord with MacIntyre (1981) when he argues that no position can be argued in a dialectic unless a narrative is told. Hence the narrative in this thesis is acknowledged as my composition, even though there is a clear attempt on my part to ground this narrative making process in the story parts contributed by the informants who were interviewed. As described above it is important to emphasise that my purpose is to

link the story parts into an integrated whole. I acknowledge that this raises the question of how a narrative such as that achieved here could be judged.

As understood above, narrative ideas, that could stand with the development in philosophy of a constructive postmodern stance (Gare, in-press a; Griffin, 1993), are relatively new and underdeveloped in management studies. Therefore it is reasonable to suggest that there is currently no agreement on how a narrative method could develop to suit the integration of theory achieved in this thesis. The work of Drummond (1996) stands as a guide, but it is also appropriate to consider how this narrative method is situated in relation to other methods that are adopted from the natural and social sciences.

In terms of data collection in management studies (which is taken here to include organisation studies) a general distinction is made that research is one of three types: quantitative, qualitative or a blend of both. While Lee (1999) notes that agreement on the definitive differences between these categories is not clearcut, there are some features that characterise differences. Traditionally experimental or quantitative research methods aim to understand and explain that which is considered to be objective reality, and broadly speaking in the counter position the qualitative approaches seek to understand the subjective viewpoint of those being studied. Some researchers recommend a combination of both, being described as a blended approach (Creswell, 1994; Lee, 1999). In terms of data collection what these methods tend to share is advocacy of a neutral or uninvolved stance for the researcher. As we shall see below, according to Ricoeur's definition of narrative, another similarity is the use of narrative activity in most research, even though may not given prominence.

Quantitative research approaches tend to be based on detailed hypotheses that are deduced from theory and the findings of previous research. Following the derivation of hypotheses, the process of testing involves variables that are precisely defined in operational terms in order to refute or accept the chosen hypotheses. Often an experimental design is used to ensure comparison with a control group. Statistical analyses are decided at the outset and these govern the decisions about participants including how many participants are required, what their age and sex is and so on. In order to achieve statistically significant findings there are rigorous criteria for validity and reliability of the various measuring instruments or tests used, and ultimately there is a concern that research conducted be capable of replication so that the findings can be verified by further research. Such an approach when used in the context of a merger could involve the use of psychological tests to identify persons experiencing stress under merger conditions or an analysis of the financial gains to be achieved out of a merger of two organisations.

While this thesis is not quantitative with respect to the description given above, it is important to note that quantitative analysis could have been used in the process of achieving the narrative. The narrative operations described below, those of prefiguration, configuration and refiguration, are usually employed to make sense of quantitative data, albeit this may not be widely emphasised. In Ricoeur's terms that which is pre-narrative in an operational sense can come as other forms of discourse, for example as categorical data or a chronology, rather than 'little stories'. With respect to quantitative data, a reasonable addition to the narrative could possibly have

been an analysis of who lost jobs in the merger and how many people were not able to quickly find a new position.

While various kinds of qualitative research approaches have been proposed (Cassell & Symon, 1994), their common aim tends to be to seek an understanding of a research question from the viewpoint of those being studied. Hence those using qualitative research methods aspire to a greater engagement with what is regarded as subjective meaning, the method of choice often being the use of interviews, perhaps combined with observation or participation by the researcher. Recent qualitative research has extended this position to posit the coexistence of multiple subjectively derived realities (Creswell, 1994). A further divide can be appreciated between those methods that seek to achieve a neutral or objective position for the researcher and/or interviewer and those in which the stance of the researcher is considered as an integral part of the design and which therefore espouse a research design with less control over this influence (Berg & Smith, 1988). As informants were interviewed in the preparation of this thesis and there is no claim that an objective interviewer position is espoused, there is some affinity between what is achieved and the qualitative research methods in the latter category.

Before leaving this brief consideration of the methods of data collection it is necessary to go one step further in regard to those methods that combine qualitative and quantitative approaches, those regarded as 'blended models' (Creswell 1994; Lee 1999). It should be emphasised that approaches that aim to study objective and subjective aspects, by regarding these as separate categories with interaction rather than positions in a process, also do not provide an analogy for this thesis. According

to Ricoeur (1976a) an explanation comes about as one part of a process, that of interpretation and understanding. Both theoretically and methodologically this puts my position in accord with Ricoeur and Bourdieu who effectively argue that our approach to objective/subjective should be one of 'both/and'. In effect what is emphasised in this thesis are the operations whereby we incorporate the objective and the subjective into a process of human understanding that is then subjected to various forces and struggles that bring the process into a circle that is productive. The reason why narrative is given prominence in regard to this hermeneutics is that most explanations are achieved in the narrative form of discourse and, as will be considered in the following, narrative ideas enable us to address the central issue of action and agency which Reed (1996, 1997) argues is one of the important frontiers at the present time in organisational research.

In summary, it is proposed that a narrative method, developed to suit the theory synthesis achieved herein, is not easily categorised in terms of the current assumptions made about data collection. To presuppose that a limit on methods is required or even tenable, could influence how new positions are arrived at. Development of methods that seek to understand 'lived experience' in a holistic way is desirable, and this activity takes us beyond the present distinctions. As both Ricoeur and Bourdieu argue, these methods will incorporate an understanding of both the subjective and objective aspects of human reality. Gare (1996) gives prominence to these as categories of process:

To begin with, primary beings are understood as processes, defined as self-ordering activities essentially durational in their nature. This means that

whatever is identified as a primary being must be seen as an immanent cause of its own becoming. In the case of a living being, the constraints associated with its immanent causation are non-holonomic and apply to both constituent processes and to interchanges of the organism with its environment. And first through the evolution of species, and then through the development of cognition in individual organisms, there is an ordered development of such constraints (p. 343).

On the basis of the foregoing, there is no aspiration in this thesis to claim a special affinity with researchers who emphasise that what we study as researchers is objective reality and the way we study it is to engage in quantitative analysis of achieved products. Neither is there a claim to special affinity with approaches that emphasise the subjective and de-emphasise the social forms that are an objective influence because we live inside the productivity that gives rise to these forms.

## **2.2 Design of the Research**

To begin, some explanation is required about confidentiality and the treatment of persons and organisations described in this thesis. It is appropriate to note that the use of gender specific pronouns, specifically 'he' and 'she', is problematic because this usage could lead to identification of persons and organisations. To address this 'he' and 'his' is preferred when describing informants. (Note that gender as a topic is not treated as central to the research question in this thesis, and the use of 'she' presents problems regarding confidentiality.) Secondly, a number of names have been changed, including those of the councils in question, and given names are not used.



It is suggested, following the above, that the merger is an activity that potentially leads to many untold stories, and these can be gathered as data in the form of story parts. I now propose to consider how the parts appropriated for this thesis came to be created, particularly those from interviews with informants.

The move to amalgamate local councils in Victoria was not unexpected at the time this research was begun. By late 1994 there had been considerable news coverage about local government amalgamations and some had already occurred in the inner region of Melbourne and in Geelong, a rural city approximately one and a half hour's drive away from the capital. It was from this news that the idea came to undertake this research and find suitable informants for it. While the purpose behind the research still required considerable development in this early phase, it was expected that the focus would be the personal experience of a merger, that one merger would be selected, and that the theoretical approach would be narrative. It was therefore decided to act quickly in terms of the unfolding events, hence the decision to begin interviews immediately and the desire to take advantage of the timing that presented itself. It is also important to note that as far as I was aware no other account had been written at this time which gave an understanding of the human experience of amalgamation in local government in Victoria; the events were emergent in early 1995.

Following the decision to begin I approached an employee of Isengate who was a known contact. This employee agreed to recruit a small number of his colleagues to be informants, and to contact a colleague at Anessa. After some consultation about the nature of what would be required, some employees were

identified by these two people and asked to participate, and subsequently I was supplied with the names and contact details of 15 people, 11 of whom were interviewed. The agreement was that informants would be interviewed on a one-to-one basis, all interviews being done by the researcher.

### 2.2.1 Informants

With regard to age, one informant was under twenty years of age, one was under 40 and the remaining informants were more than 40 years old. In terms of seniority, two of the interviewees were chief executive officers, four were operational staff with minimal supervision responsibilities and the rest were middle or senior managers. As a result of the merger two interviewees had lost their jobs at the time the interviews were conducted and for some of those remaining this was still a real possibility. A mix of both men and women were included in the group, with neither predominating.

### 2.2.2 Procedures

As the researcher I proceeded to contact the potential interviewees by telephone to make arrangements for the first interview. The project was described to informants as a study of 'the personal experience of amalgamation', and they were asked if they would agree to be interviewed a number of times, up to a maximum of six interviews. All of those contacted agreed initially, however in practical terms there was some variation in the number of interviews achieved with individual informants. For example one person agreed to be interviewed but was not available in spite of several approaches being made, whereas by contrast one person was

interviewed five times. Of the remaining participants three were interviewed twice, two were interviewed three times, and six were interviewed once. The interviews were timed to coincide with that period in the merger when it was envisaged that the influence of the changes would be beginning to be experienced in people's lives. Hence most of the interviews were conducted in early 1995, the announcement about the amalgamation having been made in late 1994.

With regard to interview style there are three main sources of influence to acknowledge. Firstly there was an intention on my part to use a style which encouraged informants to tell their own account of what was happening. For example each person interviewed was asked in the first interview for a description of how he came to be working in local government, what his position was, how long he had been in that position and so on. There were also responses/questions that directed the conversation during those times when an informant seemed to need encouragement to continue. Apart from this there was no intention on my part to undertake a structured interview; there was no set schedule of questions and no attempt to control the responses.

The second influence was my own training prior to the beginning of this research. As a result of previous studies, I was familiar with and a little experienced in some basic counselling skills and these are apparent in the interviews in their transcribed form. This style of engaging with another in therapy settings strongly resembles ethnographic interviewing methods because the predominant interviewer responses consist of affirmations to continue, open and closed questions, paraphrasing and/or summarising of what is said, and reflection of feelings back to

the interviewee. The use of such a style was intentional, as I desired to position myself as an attentive and respectful listener. But it must also be acknowledged that the timing of events influenced the mode of interviewing. As the interviews were conducted early on in the research, there was little time for detailed consideration of which interviewing style was more appropriate. Although I had read Mishler (1991) on the subject of interviewing, and acknowledge this influence in more detail below, my limited understanding of narrative theory at that time was an influence on how I proceeded. Having said this, it is possible to understand from a position of hindsight that the interviews nonetheless demonstrate the presence of what could be called a narrative style (Mishler, 1991). This is evident for example where I, as the interviewer, engage with the interviewee in a conversation whereby my interpretations are offered in the spirit of generating further contributions around a particular issue. In other words the counselling style of interviewer response was adopted, but the underlying assumptions about the importance of neutrality and objectivity are not necessarily adhered to. It is apparent in the transcripts that both narrative and ethnographic methods are present. The benefit of the former is that exchanges of meaning are generated through acknowledgment that I understood a particular line of conversation; the benefit of the latter is found in the length of informant contributions. In other words the informants had more 'air time' during the interviews and this is regarded on my part as a good outcome for an interviewer who was aiming at an attentive and respectful position of listening.

The third influence can be understood in terms of my reading of the work of Mishler (1991), who argues that an interview is a form of discourse and that as such

what is achieved between interviewer and interviewee is a joint production in terms of what is talked about and how it is talked about. He argues that interviews are the best method to use when what is studied is discourse and meaning, but that approaches which standardise questions, engage in elaborate and technologically assisted coding, and emphasise statistical procedures, give results where discourse has effectively been suppressed and the contexts of meanings become lost or overruled.

I conclude ... that the standard approach to interviewing is demonstrably inappropriate for and inadequate to the study of the central questions in the social and behavioral sciences, namely, how individuals perceive, organize, give meaning to, and express their understandings of themselves, their experiences and their worlds. Further, the traditional approach neglects to examine how their understandings are related to their social, cultural, and personal circumstances (Mishler, 1991, p. ix).

To elaborate he argues that the use of standardised forms of interview rely on certain assumptions. Firstly there is the assertion that the issues of reliability, validity, and replicability have been effectively resolved in the kind of studies that are modelled on the experimental paradigm and hence rely on statistical analyses of quantitative measures. Secondly there is a presumption that these issues have been ignored by those engaged in nontraditional forms of research, implying that they have been too easily satisfied with imprecise methods, unrepeatably analyses, and vague and ungrounded inferences. Thirdly there is a presumption that there is one 'true' interpretation from an array of data and that this interpretation may be determined by

standard, universally applicable technical procedures. Mishler's response is to argue that none of these assumptions is well grounded.

Having set this critique of standard interviewing practices, particularly those embodied in survey interviews, Mishler contends that if we treat interviews as discourse events there are four propositions that are essential: interviews are speech events, the discourse present is jointly constructed, the analysis and interpretation of these events should be based on a theory of discourse and meaning, and finally the meanings of questions and answers should be understood as contextually grounded. Given the theory synthesis achieved below it is appropriate to argue that this thesis is in accord with these ideas. Described in terms of Mishler's contribution, there were certain strategies on my part, which are apparent in the interviews that were conducted for this thesis. The approach used gives prominence to narrative activity and therefore prominence to the stories that the informants tell. There is allowance for what Mishler calls the state when an interviewee can 'hold the floor' beyond the limits of what would be a usual conversational turn. In other words the informants respond with little stories on the basis that they are "given some room to speak" (Mishler, 1991, p. 69). Mishler (1991) notes "We are more likely to find stories reported in studies using relatively unstructured interviews where respondents are invited to speak in their own voices, allowed to control the introduction and flow of topics, and encouraged to extend their responses" (p. 69). It is furthermore apparent, he says, that those interviewed are likely to tell stories if they are not interrupted, which was an attitude inherent in my position of being a respectful listener. What is involved here is the recognition on my part that meaning is being made as both people engaged in the

interview speak, hence there is often a hesitant searching out of what is intended, accompanied by clarifications on both sides. An important strategy allied to this is the ability on my part to sometimes be silent as the interviewee searches for something to say or for a way to say it. Once again this can be referenced back to the influence of counselling, where this is a difficult but important response that is brought into the mix through respectful listening. An extension of this is the presence in the interviews of digressions that are neither encouraged nor discouraged, because they are at the very least regarded as a reasonable route to more stories. Having said this it is notable that digressions on my part, as the interviewer, were minimised in line with my purpose of eliciting informants' own stories.

I argue above that I regarded myself as a joint participant in the discourse of the interview, and not as a neutral or objective researcher. Hence, like the informant contributions, mine were also sometimes halting and hesitant in what I was trying to express, or even in how I might progress the conversation. What is created is an opportunity for both of us to engage in a search for shared meaning.

As I entered into the interviewing process it must be acknowledged that I was already engaged in narrative making. There were for example expectations on my part that informants could be anxious about the organisational changes they were experiencing. But this was countered in the interviews when some informants expressed considerable optimism about their future.

In terms of the organisation as a narrative-making space it is appropriate to consider how I was the initiator of a project whereby new narrative-making spaces were created in the form of the interviews. Ricoeur (1997) speaks about the analysis

provided in therapeutic settings and how this involves a person who "authorizes speaking" (p. xli). It can be argued that I contributed to the narrative-making spaces in which the informants and I engaged in the narrative activity that achieved the story parts later used in my narrative. Similarly this activity had its own temporal character.

Interviews were conducted for the most part at the place of work; one exception was a person who had lost his job and who attended at my home to be interviewed because no other convenient place was available. Most of the interviews were conducted in a private room, although one set, at the request of the informant, was conducted in an area in an open plan office that was somewhat accessible to passersby.

Interviews were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed by the interviewer. The transcriptions include all verbal exchanges, however other contributions such as silent affirmations, laughter, pauses and tears are not always included in the transcripts. In using the transcriptions to write the narrative it is inevitable that large section of the interviews cannot be used, and a process of selection at the narrative making stage results in certain themes being highlighted. An example of contributions not used could be those instances where interviewees talk about exactly what they do, and another example could be the family related concerns that people have. Whereas the latter would have been more central in a study of family-work relations and the former would have been central in a study of workflow, in the event less significance is attached to these contributions because the interest was in the lived experience of a merger.



Because of the practical difficulties faced in the recruitment of interviewees it must be acknowledged that there are differences in the number of interviews that could be achieved with each interviewee. This could have been improved, however it is argued that the depth of material gathered provides adequate story parts to support the research question asked; what was gathered is adequate for the purposes of making the links between theory and practice which are desired in this thesis. At the later stage of thesis writing it became apparent that not all the informant stories could be given equal attention, hence preference was accorded to those where more than one interview was achieved and some continuity of development could be seen. Ideally this could have been more adequately addressed in the design stage, and this is acknowledged.

It will be seen below that some informants are considered in some detail, particularly Ki, who was the CEO of Isengate, Keep, who was a younger member of the human resources department of Isengate, Red, who was a middle manager in community services in Anessa, Rom, who was a middle level engineer in Isengate, Dune, who was a middle level manager at Anessa, and Tem who was the new CEO of Solmarco. While a *dramatis personae* is offered in Appendix 1, we should also be mindful that it is only from the position of hindsight and this thesis, that a *dramatis personae* could be included as an aid to reading.

Having undertaken the interviews and transcribed them the process of writing the narrative was begun. It can be seen that segments of interviews are treated as if they are parts of a larger narrative when brought together with story parts and texts from other sources. It can also be appreciated that the strategies involved in the

writing of the narrative can be considered here; so I shall begin with the text as it is achieved and then consider my position as the author of that text. Following on from this I consider the reader of this thesis and the authorship/readership issues that emerge from the story parts related by informants.

As a narrative is a configuration drawn from a succession, it is appropriate to consider what form of a narrative is achieved in this thesis. While there are conventions about thesis writing and expectations on the part of readers that clearly influence what is achieved herein, there is another aspect in relation to the merger that should be given prominence. Morson (1994) suggests that life has 'many loose threads' that have the potential for development, but that in a narrative only some of these threads are picked up and become important; many threads never come to anything. In novels for example there may never be a moment when all the threads are synthesised and an "impression of completeness is offered" (Morson, 1994, p. 169), and some authors set out deliberately to show this. For example Tolstoy created what Morson calls an 'aperture'. Rather than emulate authors who plan a novel such that the ending is silently present in the beginning, Tolstoy uses aperture to present the reader with the possibility of achieving a wisdom of a different kind of temporal experience. In the context of many novels, beginnings and endings are narratively imposed, and closure is achieved from some imagined social space. In this thesis the notion of aperture onto life gives us an appreciation of the difficulties faced when a thesis is expected to meet certain conventions about 'closure', and these expectations may differ from those we might have for example for novels. Unlike a novel there is no claim that this thesis creates an aperture onto an imaginary space, nevertheless the

idea that there may be 'loose threads' is still tenable. Firstly this is of interest because there is an aspiration to describe a lived experience where open/closed was a central dynamic for the employees at the time of the merger, as we shall see below. Secondly even though thesis writing is a genre that does not permit one to easily capture this 'loose threads' nature of the lived experience of a merger, we must nevertheless assume that this was present for employees at the time of the merger. In other words it is not assumed that the social space from which my narrative is drawn is fictional, but like a fiction in the form of an 'aperture' the account offered has a quality of completeness that may not have been present in the lived experience at the time. In another example of this, it must be assumed that at the time the interviews were conducted the significance of events was not predetermined. It is only at the later stage of narrative making that the events take on new meanings in the context of the whole narrative. We would have to conclude that both the narrative making of informants and my activity would be influenced by these dynamics. In other words events are narrated in the context of later and earlier events, and in the context of larger narratives and life narratives, many of which possibly remain untold. Furthermore it could also be argued that a thesis is similar to other narrative projects, in that it too develops and takes many forms in the process of writing. The final version has within it the many turns not taken or even taken and then reauthored, and this openness of possibility must be acknowledged. Like other texts, a thesis is not a closed and autonomous entity whose meaning is fixed at the level of what the author of it intends.

It is also appropriate to consider the extent of the order already present at the prenarrative stage, an order that finds expression in the thesis. The experience of informants did have some commonality in terms of events and time. For example the job losses, the appointment of a new Chief Executive and new senior staff, the government announcements in the Press and the government reports had the character of events with their own temporality. We shall see how such events have temporal coherence according to Carr (1986). Both in relation to temporal and spatial ordering these events themselves 'belong' to an existing order, and do not occur in isolation.

With respect to authorship it is acknowledged that in my position as researcher I am both reader and author, and as we shall see the balance achieved between these is a creative one. At the simplest level I can 'read' the little stories which emerge in the joint production of the interviews, but it is clear that I begin as part of my own reading to make the synthesis between the little stories and larger stories or even my own story. Although there are authors who proffer ways to analyse narratives in an extant form (Czarniawska, 1997b; Reissman, 1994), these authors provide little assistance in understanding the work of the narrative maker as a co-creator and the text as a result of this process of co-creation. As this thesis is an achievement that is subject to the forces I consider under the heading of theory it is appropriate to reflect on some of these forces, even if no claim can be made to an exhaustive reflection.

Ricoeur (1984) argues that all narrative makes a break with mimesis<sub>1</sub> or the prefiguration stage and therefore has a fictive aspect to it, even though it may purport to be a rendition of the truth in terms of the aims of the author. The distinction we

then make, between for example history and fiction, while useful and very practical, becomes more a case of avoiding complete conflation than it is a case of achieving a clear distinction. My narrative, as it is positioned on the other side of mimesis<sub>1</sub>, enters the region where these distinctions become problematic. Previously I described how my interviews encourage storytelling on behalf of my informants. This strategy also finds an extension at the stage of narrative making in the sense that I have included large portions of the interviews in the thesis. I position myself in such a way as to respect the meaning achieved in the little stories and in the authority present in other sources used. I also assume that the accounts of those informants as appropriated have a narrative truth-value for each informant that can be respected.

While it is my contention that there is no claim that a true story is present in the events and is there to be 'recovered', I do aim to persuade the reader of the truth of my account and there is no intention to assert that this is fiction. The purpose is to aim at a adequate account, while recognising that other accounts could be narrated, and that what is achieved leads the process towards a potentially more adequate rendering. Counterbalanced to this is the intention to be true to the sources, as the characters are real people, the events and interviews can be verified as having happened, the sources of story parts used can be verified in the sense that texts exist and so do actions. But again there are numerous decisions made in this effort; for example as author I have choices over event sequencing in the narrative, on closure, and on the inclusion of segments of what informants have to say. Furthermore I acknowledge that there is a degree of complexity present that renders my narrative partial. There is no claim that it is complete. The concordance achieved out of

discordance is not an achievement of the characters in the narrative; it is my achievement. Aligned to this is the bringing in of other sources as part of my authorship. Apart from the interviews, I link the story into the field of government in Australia and the development of the larger story at an international level. In order to do this I use relevant texts that can be seen and judged as relevant according to what they contribute to the thesis.

We shall see how Ricoeur reminds us that texts do not stand-alone and that the meaning of a text is only played out in the relationship of authors, texts and readers. The narrative made here will not only be read but also interpreted and judged as part of a community of readings. A reader may bring to this experience a position in a tradition of readings and certain accompanying presuppositions that are deemed by that reader to be true. So for example those readers who are committed to a modernist position on what constitutes truth, and the experimental/quantitative mode of undertaking research that tends to be privileged in relation to this position, will find in this thesis a different direction. It is acknowledged that there may be expectations about evidence, and the nature of truth, that are not met. Such readers may assert that it is products rather than productivity that should be a central concern. The danger in this position is that the dynamic of activity/passivity, as a property of a complex system (Allen & Starr, 1982), may be hidden from view. For example a reader could assert that there already exists a communal agreement or truth on what constitutes 'real' research and that this position is not open to reauthorship. We could argue that this position acts to constrain the emergence of a theory that would enable us to account for the rhetorical element of hermeneutics, as this is described below

under the heading of a theory of reading. As Reagan (1995a) argues, following Ricoeur, "The acceptability of an interpretation resides first in the arguments and evidence that support it, and ultimately in the consensus of those who are knowledgeable in the area and who participate in the debate" (p. 336). This is consonant with a communal equivalent of the hermeneutics of interpretation (Ricoeur, 1995b) understood as the process of interpretation, understanding, and explanation that is at work at the level of texts, action, and history. The component of judgement, understood as the process of validating a claim, does not mean verification; "Rather it refers to a process of falsification and probable reasoning which aims at establishing an interpretation as more probable than another" (Reagan, 1995, p. 335). Also, that a text admits of more than one interpretation does not mean that all interpretations are equal; we can argue for or against interpretations, we can confront them, arbitrate between them and seek for an agreement even though this agreement may be out of reach.

Aligned to the question of what constitutes truth, which has already been considered in Part 1, there is also the question of causation. Due to attempts in the natural sciences to facilitate prediction and control emphasis is placed on the link between what are regarded as causes and their effects. A phenomenon is studied as an effect with a cause which is discoverable through scientific inquiry, and the purpose of the search is to find regularities and universalities such that laws may be applied to the process of interpretation and understanding. Ricoeur (1984) argues that while causal analysis is a legitimate practice in the human sciences as part of the question 'Why?' and the response 'Because ...', it is not necessary to reduce all such attempts at

explanation to the one process of linking causes to laws, as is done in natural science (p. 126). He likens causal analysis to a contest in which certain criteria must be met. In this sense to explain is to justify. The tests he gives for this are the inductive test, wherein the factor considered must be really necessary to the line of interpretation and understanding taken, and the pragmatic test wherein "there must be a reason for selecting the condition in question from among the conditions that as a whole constitute the sufficient condition for the phenomenon" (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 129). Ricoeur argues that these constitute an eminently open inquiry.

We shall also see below that Ricoeur (1976a) argues for a general theory of interpretation which brings together explanation, which has been regarded in some positions as the work of science, and understanding, which has been regarded as the work of the humanities, into one process whereby first we seek to understand something and then we make an interpretation which leads to an explanation. According to a hermeneutic position explanations are linked to the further operation of understanding, thus completing the circle through interpretation and on to explanation again. By this manner Ricoeur argues that even though in science we may privilege only one aspect of the operations, all aspects are present regardless, and this thesis is in accord with these ideas.

With respect to a narrative position on causation Ricoeur does not insist that attempts to establish laws are inappropriate. Rather he regards laws as part of the narrative fabric. "I would prefer to emphasize the fact that laws are interpolated into the narrative fabric instead of insisting on their inappropriateness" (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 127). He argues for a range of explanation to be recognised, from explanation by



laws, to singular causal explanation, to judgement processes and rational explanation. It is argued here that narrative theory opens the understanding of causation to encompass other explanations, not just the adoption of the narrow sense of cause as it is used in the natural sciences.

In Part 1 above it is concluded that narrative ideas have not yet been applied in the English language literature to understand the lived experience of an organisational merger, even though there is a resurgence of interest in narrative ideas occurring in the literature of management studies (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Boje, 1991, 1995, 1999; Calas & Smircich, 1999; Czarniawska, 1997a; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1995; Drummond, 1998; Jones, 1998, 2001; O'Connor, 2000; Reed, 1996). It was argued that this interest is yet to extend to the kind of constructive postmodern position advocated by Gare (in press-a) and Griffin (1993). For all these reasons we can appreciate that a narrative method could be developed in management studies that is consonant with the theory synthesis given below.

We have seen the pitfalls for an understanding of truth as it has been conceptualised in terms of the poles given by Reed (1996). We shall also see how MacIntyre (1977) argues that it is only when a new narrative is composed which incorporates the old adversary positions into one synthesis, which is then widely accepted, that we open the way to a new truth. In this thesis narrative is regarded as a central discourse form, discourse is regarded as language events, and human reality and truth are not considered to be separate from language. Bernstein (1987) proposes that a way to open up new possibilities is to conceptualise 'reality' as something which results from communal processes, especially those which are contoured by

language. He argues that social reality is constituted dialogically “within communities that reach objective-intersubjective agreement” (Bernstein, 1987, p. 25). On the basis of what is achieved in this thesis it is appropriate to argue that it is through narratives that the notion of truth as a communal truth is tenable. By communal truth I invoke the idea that a community of readers can come to agreement on the truth of a particular narrative and such agreement could have duration in time and space. My thesis is then offered as a text for reading in a tradition of readings, and can be judged accordingly.

In closing this part it is important to note that no narrative studies have been undertaken in the English language literature to ask a similar research question to that asked in this thesis, and none, to the knowledge of the author at the time of writing, have invoked the kind of theory synthesis achieved herein to apply to the lived experience of a merger. It is also of note that even at the broader thematic level of narrative activity as a contributor to relationship, transformation, and identity there could be a great deal more to achieve in management studies. Research that invokes a 'constructivist postmodern' stance could be the position most in need of development in order to answer questions such as those asked in this thesis. Furthermore, the synthesis achieved in this thesis, which stands with that of Gare (1993, 1995, 1996) and Drummond (1996, 1998), is relevant to management studies because it is about action. It therefore can be invoked in response to calls within management studies for better theories to understand action and agency (Reed, 1996; Wilmott, 1994). We shall see in this regard that certain theorists assist us to understand how there is active emergence at the levels of large social forms (Bourdieu, 1998b; Carr, 1986; Gare,

1996; Honneth, 1996; MacIntyre, 1977, 1981; Ricoeur, 1984), and furthermore that persons and organisations are also actively emergent and self-organising as processes of becoming.

It is appropriate to consider on the basis of the foregoing how this thesis can be judged. It is acknowledged that the answering of the research question is primary, and this is addressed at the level of the whole thesis. Secondary to this is the task of assisting the reader to understand what was done to gather the story parts of the thesis, a reflection on what makes an narrative account stand up to scrutiny, and a description of how this account is located within a tradition of readings. In the above an account is made of how the interviews were conducted and how the narrative offered is written using interview parts and other documents. A description of how this thesis is grounded in the practical field of local government is offered. As a text in narrative form, this thesis can be judged according to its coherence, for example it is contended that the method used is consistent with the theory integration offered. Because each of the parts is integrated into a whole, the whole itself can be seen to create meaning that is greater than the sum of the parts. Within the author's activity it is acknowledged that there is also diversity in the parts. Authorship begins, during the interviews, 'inside' the conditions that are being researched, and moves later to a position of narrative maker as shown by the extent to which one person makes the account of what is researched. Furthermore, the text is acknowledged to have its own existence which may contribute to new understanding on the part of readers, especially those readers from the field of management studies who are concerned with the lived experience of organisation transformations. In this sense the text is part

of a tradition of readings and this is addressed within the context of the English language literature on management studies. More broadly, an attempt is made to situate this tradition within the context of a larger tradition of thought. This tradition encompasses the revaluation and extension of positions such as process philosophy, which could be given greater prominence in future developments. Returning to the academic field there is an account in Part 1 above of how narrative ideas contribute to an understanding of action, given that the combination of action, relationship, transformation, and identity is so far undertheorised. Finally it is contended that this mode of inquiry offers an understanding, through narrative as a form, of those very same processes that informants in this thesis could be using as they live inside the conditions present in an organisational merger; that is an account in narrative form is made or achieved.

In summary some methodological considerations are given in this part. A methodology is advocated that enables a synthesis of my narrative activity, that of the narrative theorists and Bourdieu (1998) as a social theorist, that of the authors of various texts used in the form of government reports and debates, and that of the informants as expressed in interviews undertaken for this research. Furthermore, as narrative is a synthesis that is creative, and this narrative is not just an additive of these contributions, it is acknowledged that this thesis is not only achieved but also that it has a life. In this regard it becomes semi-autonomous from the authorship that brings it into being, and does not complete its own trajectory until it becomes meaningful for a reader. Hence the activity of reading and the stance of a reader of this thesis is considered as well.

## **Part 3 Belonging to Meaningful Practices**

### **3.1 Shared Meaning: the World of Action as Language and Tradition**

The activities of making shared meaning and making a position in social space will be considered in this part. Following the ideas of Schelling, 'shared meaning' is construed as an achievement of a process of ongoing debate or argument (Bourdieu, 1991, 1993; MacIntyre, 1981), which can also be understood as an 'ongoing conflict of interpretations' (Ricoeur, 1974b, 1991j). Later we shall see that there is no contribution to an ongoing debate unless an agent engages in narrative-making and positioning. For example, in order to argue that this is not the case one would have to make a narrative (MacIntyre, 1981) and take a position on how that narrative contributes. Taking a position in social space means becoming involved in what the argument is about. 'Agents', by which is intended both persons and collectives, both take a position in the debate and are positioned by the debate. In this regard any narrative about local government reform must be understood in relation to a larger space of meaning, wherein what is contested is what it means to provide a public service at the local level.

'Public service' is usually described as an activity:

The body of people engaged to carry out the work of the executive arm of government, putting into operation the legislation enacted by Parliament and any subordinate legislation .... [it] includes the framework within which people are employed in government departments [to] give practical effect to

the policies of government (Butterworths Australian legal dictionary, 1997, p. 957).

At each level of government there is engagement in this activity, for example at the federal level of government in Australia we find the Commonwealth Government position on the reform of the public service described in their official publications.

Over the last two decades, the Australian Public Service has undergone substantial change, both in its internal management processes and in its methods of service delivery. Examples of management changes include the introduction of accrual budgeting in the 1999-2000 Budget, an emphasis on reaching performance targets, the costing of government 'outputs', the imposition of capital use charges, the devolution of responsibility to departments and more flexible employment practices. Examples of changes to service delivery include the trend towards providing information and other services on the Internet, increased contracting of service delivery to the private sector and the establishment of customer service charters.

Public resources are harnessed by the public sector to give practical effect to government policies. Traditionally, this process has been known as public administration. Increasingly, it is known as public management, reflecting the growing expectation that public sector managers will take responsibility for achieving results, as well as the increasing emphasis on efficiency (Australia. Bureau of Statistics, 2001, p. 59).

For the purposes of this thesis this is a contribution to the social space. According to Bourdieu (1993, 1998b) a social space is an invisible reality that cannot

be shown, but which nevertheless organises our actions. Social spaces exist in relation to the 'economy of symbolic transactions', by which he intends in a very broad sense 'meaning' (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 10). A field of practice, such as that of government, is a social space and an organisation is a social space that is sub-field. In this thesis local government and Solmarco, the new organisation formed from the merger, can be said to be positioned as 'sub-field'. The ongoing argument in the field of government is about 'how it is best to govern Australia', and the question of what constitutes a public service is central in this debate.

Below is the first quote from an informant interviewed for this thesis. In this quote we see Red, whose story will be considered in more detail in Part 6, struggling to work out what constitutes his contribution as an employee and 'public servant' in the new Solmarco:

Red – It's a process of discovery. And every now and then one of us will find a report or some document from the past that sheds light on the present. So I use the word 'discovery'. My manager is the Executive Ferret and I'm the Ferret in Training basically. This is the language that we use and we have in fact come up with a number of items that have helped us in terms of making sense of what our current role is, what our job is – and the information we are meant to provide to our funding bodies. So major major celebrations occur around discoveries. But we are working still in the dark. Bits of light then shoot in between (Interview with Red, October, 1995, p. 7). (Note that Red was employed at Anessa prior to the merger. At the time of the interviews he had worked his way up from two simultaneous and part-time community

services positions, and was aspiring to a higher level middle management position).

As Australia is a constitutional democracy based on a federal division of powers, the Commonwealth Government is one of the three levels of government, the other two being the local and state levels. Although government-to-government relations within Australia are complex, and a characterisation of them as strictly hierarchical is not appropriate, it is clear that the reforms to local government were brought in by the Victorian State Government through its Local Government Board. Local councils gain their authority to govern through State Government legislation; in Victoria this is enshrined in the Local government act 1989, and its predecessors.

It was under this legislation that between 1993 and 1995 the Victorian State Government undertook a reform program on its less powerful bedfellow – local government. It was in this context that the City of Isengate and the City of Anessa were amalgamated to form the City of Solmarco. The State Government, running a conservative Liberal/National Party political agenda of major change following years of social democrat Labor Party rule, legislated to reduce the number of local government areas in Victoria from 210 to 78. This resulted in what were known as the 'local government amalgamations' whereby parts of former local government electorates, and in some cases whole existing electorates, were joined to form new larger electorates. The amalgamations were undertaken in stages on a region by region basis. The one of concern in this thesis was part of the stage that occurred in late 1994.



But before proceeding it is important to clarify the use of the word 'merger' in relation to the term 'amalgamation'. An amalgamation in everyday language is defined as the "merging of two or more business concerns into one" (The Australian concise Oxford dictionary of current English, 1987 p. 28). A merger is similarly defined as the "combining of two commercial companies into one" (The Australian concise Oxford dictionary of current English, 1987 p. 677). At this level of everyday or ordinary language, 'merge' could be understood in relation to 'emerge', which is associated with 'newly independent', and 'amalgamate' in relation to 'amalgam', which denotes an alloy of metals. While there appears to be some distinction between the two terms in meaning, it is in the use of these terms that there are greater differences. Whereas in the corporate or business sense two companies are said to come together in a merger, the use of this term in relation to government and non-government organisations is less common, with the term 'amalgamation' being more widely used, particularly in Australia.

In this thesis 'amalgamation' will usually refer to the actions of the State Government and the political amalgamation of two local councils – the City of Anessa and the City of Isengate. Through amalgamation the State Government joined two local councils that were physically adjacent and connected by a section of common boundary. This action created a new electoral boundary around both, and a larger electorate with more ratepayers (voters or constituents) was formed. 'Amalgamation' is also used by the informants in this thesis. When they are speaking, 'amalgamation' can refer to either the political amalgamations or the mergers of the organisations.

In an attempt to clarify this confusion, 'merger', when used in this thesis, refers to the physical and social joining of the organisations Anessa and Isengate to form the new organisation, Solmarco. Because this thesis is intended as a contribution to management studies, prominence is given to the lived experience of an organisational merger rather than the study of politics. This distinction notwithstanding, the relation of the organisational merger to the political amalgamation will still feature in this thesis, because an account of the merger cannot be made without this important relationship. In other words it was the political action of amalgamating the City of Anessa with the City of Isengate that lead to the organisational merger of Isengate and Anessa. Both actions are attributable to the same agent – the State Government.

We have seen above that the State Government was a Liberal/National Party Coalition. In Australia at the level of field two large political parties are major contributors to the debate over what constitutes a public service; these are the Liberal Party, which tends to operate in a coalition with the smaller National Party, and the Labor Party. Other more minor parties contribute too, including the Australian Democrats. Elected representatives from these parties sit in the parliaments at the State and Federal levels, with broadly speaking the party or coalition holding the majority of seats wielding the most power and being in the position 'to govern'. This is the nature of the 'Westminster System' which has its origins in the British "system of representative government ... characterised by an executive council sitting within, and being responsible to, the legislature" (Butterworths Australian legal dictionary, 1997, p. 1265). The federal and state levels of the Australian Government operate

according to the Australian Constitution, which adopts this Westminster System (Alderson, 1999). Parliaments are 'two tiered' or 'bicameral' for they consist of two chambers: a lower house and an upper house. Members of parliament are elected to one of the two houses. At the time of the amalgamations, members of the Liberal/National Coalition in the State Government held the majority of seats in both houses. The executive, known at the state level as 'the Cabinet' is a powerful influence on the legislative process. Opposition to local government reform was most likely to come from the Labor Party representatives in these houses. Local government is different to the state and federal governments in this regard, as there is one council of elected representatives for each local council. The issue of local government accountability is complex; this will become more apparent later in this thesis.

The administrative counterpart to the parliament at the state and federal levels is 'the public service', which is described above. Employees in local government organisations, who can also be regarded as public servants, contribute to the debate over the nature of 'public service activity', and of course they are among many who seek to do so – other public servants, the professions, companies, non-government organisations, business people, artists, unions, churches, sports people, and social lobby groups, to name but a few. Notwithstanding other contributors, one can conclude that the public servants and the politicians at the various levels of government are major players in the field and hence in the argument that is constitutive of the field.

A local government electorate is smaller than a State, and the latter is smaller than the federal government. Australia is a federation of six States, one of which is Victoria, plus two Territories. Whereas at the state and federal levels there are parliaments, at the local level those elected by ratepayers are known as 'councillors'. (Note it is sufficient for my purposes to define 'ratepayers' as those who vote, including property owners and residents). Councillors sit at the local level as what is called 'the council'; they form the representative body as the counterpart to public servants at the local level. The person who holds the most senior position among the elected councillors is the Mayor. It is usual for the Mayor, as the elected head, to work closely with the City Manager or CEO, who is appointed by the council to head the local government organisation.

When considering who introduced the changes to local councils in Victoria, it is clear that we can answer it was the State Government of Victoria. As Australia is a federation of state governments there are powers at the state level that other levels do not have, and the power to legislate changes to local government exists at the state level. The Commonwealth Government, with its national or federal responsibilities and powers, rarely overrides policy decisions at the state level, but counterbalanced to this it has considerable economic influence. It is at this national level that the majority of tax (personal, consumption, and company tax) is collected to fund the activities of State Governments, and to a lesser extent some local government activities such as community services. The State Government is involved in the provision of services in culture and the arts, education, health, policing, tourism, major roads, and major infrastructure such as public transport; all are within the state.

'Amalgamation' was used by the State Government to describe part of its program of local government reform. We have seen above that the amalgamations, in a political sense, were of local councils; the electoral boundaries were redrawn in order to dramatically reduce the number of local government electorates in Victoria. In this process of reform in the eastern regions of Melbourne the elected councils were dismissed, and the local government organisations were merged to form new organisations. For employees in local government the amalgamations were part of a program of reform at the heart of which was the question over what constitutes a public service at the local level. But it was not the elected representatives at the local level who were most powerful in the debate, because they were dismissed by the elected representatives, that is, politicians, at the State level. "Evidence can be produced to show that the local government reforms of this government in the 24 months since it came to power are unsurpassed in the history of this state" (Victoria. Parliament. House of Assembly, 1994, October 19, p. 1).

We find the State Government position on local government reform in their publications. Included were the amalgamations and the introduction at the same time of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) which would open the work done at this level to competition from business and other government organisations. The reasons put forward for the reforms included a desire to achieve better economies of scale, savings to ratepayers in the form of cuts to rates (local government tax), eradication of what the State politicians regarded as poor work practices and entrenched interests within existing staffing structures, and better planning through streamlined approaches to services. Congruent with this it was predicted that

ratepayers would benefit from improved local government services. "The reality is that this government is about improving the lot of ratepayers, the people who pay the bills" (Victoria. Parliament. House of Assembly, 1994, October 19, p. 12). These ratepayers are described as "major shareholders" in local government (Victoria. Parliament. House of Assembly, 1994, October 19, p. 13).

The Government's policy on boundary change is that a restructuring proposal should provide the potential to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of local government. These objectives should be paramount (Local Government Act 1989: terms of reference for the Local Government Board Press Release by Robert Maclellan, Acting Minister for Local Government, 1 July 1994 appended Victoria. Parliament. Local Government Board, 1994).

At the same time the State Government's new policy on boundary changes (that is the political amalgamations) was referenced to the terms of operation for the Local Government Board.

As provided in section 2201 of the Act, the Board may have regard to all or any of the following considerations in conducting a review:

sociological, demographic, topographic, economic and employment patterns and factors in the area covered by the review;

community or diversity of interest in the area covered by the review, including community identity, expectations and involvement;

the impact of any proposals being considered by the Board on the accessibility to and the effective and efficient delivery of local government services in the area covered by the review;

the financial impact of any proposal being considered by the Board on the area covered by the review; and

any other matters that the Board considers to be relevant (Local Government Act 1989 cited in Victoria. Parliament. Local Government Board, 1994, p. 4).

The Local Government Board of the State Government asserted that councils should be big enough to achieve economies of scale and other efficiencies, yet still small enough to deal with the interests and concerns of individual ratepayers. The Board reports emphasise these economies and assert that widespread agreement had been reached on the changes as these were publicised in an interim board report. "Individual reference area councils have been vocal in their criticism of the Board's financial analysis, but collectively they have arrived at a position which does not differ radically from that outlined in the interim report" (Victoria. Parliament. Local Government Board, 1994, p. 5).

Each of the Board's proposals promises significant savings to the community – but only if they are accompanied by the new management arrangements and concerted efforts to reduce waste and duplication. Whilst structural reform can be expected to catalyse rapid organisation and cultural change, the savings identified in this report will not occur immediately. In fact, there will be additional transitional costs associated with implementing the Board's proposals – although we are confident that these will be offset by rationalising

assets. After that, savings will be realised progressively over several years, permanently lowering the cost of local government in ... [suburban] Melbourne (Victoria. Parliament. Local Government Board, 1994, p. 5).

Services were not to be affected by these financial changes and the 'potential for savings' was described:

The interim report argued that the economies of scale resulting from the restructuring of local government in middle and outer Melbourne would result in significant savings being achieved without necessitating a reduction in the range or level of services offered by councils .... The potential for savings through economies of scale has been recognised in many submissions to the Board .... The financial analysis was based on the premise that all existing services which a constituent council offers would be maintained at current levels in the new municipality. It did not, as has been suggested in several submissions, presume that service levels will be reduced .... The Board has argued previously that the overall savings from restructuring could be used to reduce rates, redeem debt, improve infrastructure and services or a combination of these (Victoria. Parliament. Local Government Board, p. 39-40).

"The fact is it will mean better services and increased services for ratepayers, not fewer services" (Victoria. Parliament, October 19, p. 12). Furthermore the State Government called on evidence from previous amalgamations to support their position.



The savings achieved to date by the City of Geelong, which was created in May 1993, provides concrete evidence that municipal restructuring does have the potential to reduce the cost of local government to the community (Victoria. Parliament. Local Government Board, p. 39).

Following the previous local government amalgamations, notably in the areas of Geelong and the inner city of Melbourne, it was July 1 1994 when the Acting Minister for Local Government requested that the Local Government Board review and report on the most appropriate local government structure for the middle and outer Melbourne metropolitan area (Victoria. Parliament. Local Government Board, 1994, p. 1). The notice advising the review and seeking submissions was publicly displayed on July 2 1994. In the interim report released by the Board on October 21 1994 the creation of twenty four new local councils was advised. Subsequently the Board received submissions from each of the councils covered by the process, as well as some 35,000 written submissions from groups and individuals. There were also a number of petitions relating to the recommendations in the interim report. The Board notes "In general the response of the councils to the Board's proposals was favourable" (Victoria. Parliament. Local Government Board, p. 2).

Later we shall see that the new CEO for Solmarco was supportive of local government reform. We shall also see that this person had previously been a senior Commonwealth public servant, and a senior State government public servant.

Tem – Well basically I'm committed to what the Government's trying to do here. If I wasn't I wouldn't be here. I mean I do believe there is need for local government reform. And what I will be doing is doing it in the most effective

way that I know how to do (Interview with Tem, May, 1995, p. 9). (Note that Tem was appointed as the successor to the interim CEO of Solmarco. He was the new and ongoing CEO of the new organisation, Solmarco.)

If we emphasise the notion of 'ongoing', the debate over what constitutes a public service can be construed as a tradition that is actively emergent. Williams (1988) notes that 'tradition' is a word with a difficult history. It has its origins in the Latin for 'to hand over or deliver' as in handing down of knowledge or passing on of doctrine, but Williams (1988) notes "Tradition survives in English as a description of a general process of handing down, but there is a very strong and often predominant sense of this entailing respect or duty" (p. 319). In the following it will be seen, through the writings of Ricoeur (1974b) and MacIntyre (1981), that we can speak of a 'living' tradition. But to set this in context, it is appropriate to begin with language, because it is at the level of language that shared meaning can be achieved about what it means to provide a 'public service'.

For Ricoeur (1976b), and other philosophers of his generation, language exists both as an objectified virtual system or code, and as discourse. He accordingly argues that the code is collective, it exists as a set of contemporaneous elements (a synchronic system), and it is anonymous in the sense that it is not intended. It is unconscious, not in the sense of a Freudian libidinal unconscious, but rather in the sense of a structural or cultural unconscious (Ricoeur, 1976b). Discourse, by contrast, is a message that occurs as an event in a succession of events (as diachronic time); it is a temporal event within language. Hence it is language as realised, or language 'as used' that is the realm of discourse. Ricoeur argues that it is in discourse that all

messages are exchanged and dialogue is established which can be started, continued or interrupted. Whereas language lacks a subject, discourse bears the intentions of the messenger and is always addressed to someone. Equally it can be said that language lacks a world, but that discourse is always about something. Language may be the condition required for communication to occur, but it is in discourse that messages are exchanged (Ricoeur, 1991h). Therefore, Ricoeur (1976b) argues, language is the mediator in the relationship between meaning as achievement and discourse as event. We can further understand the features of discourse by appreciating that discourse is structured because it refers back to its speaker by means of a complex set of indicators in language; for example personal pronouns are used when discourse is self-referential. The event of discourse is linked to the person who speaks and because of this we can speak of a dialectic of event and meaning (Ricoeur, 1991c). At this level the event of amalgamation is a discourse event within language and it brings with it the intentions of the State Government. They act within the context of meanings already achieved, and they make a contribution to the ongoing debate about the nature of local government organisations and the services such organisations provide.

For Ricoeur (1978b) it is a given that language cannot be reduced to univocal meanings because it is within language that plurivocity abounds. Words have multiple meaning or polysemy and sentences have ambiguity, and because of this full works of discourse such as poems and narratives call for a process of interpretation (Ricoeur, 1976a). In seeking to explain interpretation Ricoeur (1978b) begins with symbolism, having already argued that all symbolisms find their expression within language. He

defines a symbol as "any structure of significance in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative and which can be apprehended only through the first" (Ricoeur, 1978a, p. 98), and he builds on this to define interpretation as "the work of thought which consists in deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning, in unfolding the levels of meaning implied in the literal meaning" (Ricoeur, 1978a, p. 98). The symbol invites our participation because it "calls for an interpretation, precisely because it says more than it says and because it never ceases to speak to us" (Ricoeur, (1974a, p. 27). At this level of a general theory of interpretation Ricoeur argues that symbol and interpretation become correlative concepts; there is interpretation wherever there is multiple meaning, and it is in interpretation that the plurality of meanings is manifested (Ricoeur, 1978a). In other words at the level of symbol there is a gap, one of distance between the symbol itself and what the symbol stands for. It is at this level that interpretation is the movement between them; we can say that as soon as there is distance there is relationship and the possibility for this relationship to be productive.

As a dynamic process, interpretation incorporates the nonmethodical moment of understanding and the methodical moment of explanation (Ricoeur, 1978a, 1991c, 1991k). Ricoeur (1991c) describes this relationship thus: "Understanding ... precedes, accompanies, concludes, and thus *envelops* explanation. Explanation, in turn, *develops* understanding analytically" (p. 142). So we appreciate that these are distinct but related moments; they are in a dialectical relationship. In other words interpretation cannot be reduced to either one of them, and yet they cannot stand alone. "Just as language, by being actualized in discourse, surpasses itself as system

and realizes itself as event, so too discourse, by entering the process of understanding, surpasses itself as event and becomes meaning" (Ricoeur, 1991c, p. 78). Later it will be seen that an understanding of the process of interpretation is important when we come to consider the one who interprets, in other words the meaning-making agent. Ricoeur (1978a) argues that in seeking to understand ourselves "we appropriate to ourselves the meaning of our desire to be or of our effort to exist" (p. 105). The effort he speaks of relates to positive energy and dynamism, while the desire is the lack or poverty of this energy. In this sense it is important to note that 'understanding' is intended to denote not only the nonmethodical moment in the process, but also our understanding of 'being', what Ricoeur (1991c) calls "our belonging to the whole of what is" (p. 143).

As part of the process of interpretation, new meaning is achieved or created in the context of existing meanings, but these existing meanings are neither unstructured nor without differentiation, and nor are they static. We have seen that Ricoeur argues that we belong to language at the level of 'world'. Carr (1986) makes a similar claim about 'belonging' when he argues for the importance of attending to the temporal structure of experience and action. From the above it can be argued that an agent does not act in isolation as the dynamics at this level have their own life in terms of language; there is both an horizon and background for the everyday use of the notion of what it means to give a public service. In other words because of these dynamics the notion 'public service' has life itself at the level of interpretation in language.

When the State Government argues that individual reference area councils, while vocal in their criticism of the Board's financial analysis, still collectively

arrived at a position that did not differ radically from that outlined in their interim report, it is apparent that the interpretation the State Government makes of 'public service' could be limiting of any new interpretation that is made. As it holds a powerful interpretive position in the ongoing argument, it is their interpretation that influences the debate at this point in the living tradition. By its own account public service is about good economic management, and it is likely that any interpretation which does not respond to this concern over economics will not be regarded as part of the argument. This is also apparent in the position of the new CEO of Solmarco.

Tem – Well at the moment the Government has insisted [on] a reduction of twenty percent of their rates. (Note that the taxes at the local level are known as 'rates' and those who pay them as 'ratepayers'.) So *that* we will deliver, but in the longer run I believe in this city people can afford to pay for amenities and we need to have money. What we need to do is improve the budgeting process and eliminate waste and then we'll see. We need to see what the City wants, what it needs in the way of amenities and what the City is prepared to pay for it. But a lot of people have said to me they don't want their rates cut. They prefer to have the services. .... Well it's not from everyone of course. There's a lot of people that can't afford to pay their rates – even in this City. But many people in the city are saying we don't want our rates reduced because we need the services and we're prepared to pay for them.

Bonna – That seems to be ... one of the major concerns within the staff – that the kind of services that Local Government have been giving may not be possible.

Tem – I believe it'll be improved actually. I believe it'll be improved – if it's not we've failed.

Bonna – So what sort of improvements?

Tem – Efficiency, effectiveness – even services across the board. And that will mean that some aspects of the service might be reduced (Interview with Tem, May 1995, p. 7).

We saw above that the presence of multiple meaning, or layers of meaning, calls for a process of interpretation. Inherent to the process is the possibility of multiple interpretations and the likelihood of opposing interpretations, which Ricoeur (1974a) describes as the 'conflict of interpretations'. Ricoeur (1978a) argues that each interpretation by definition reduces the richness or multivocality of meaning and translates the symbol according to its own frame of reference, and because of this it may be in conflict with another interpretation. In other words each interpretation is an attempt to limit or control meaning and the interpretation that another can subsequently make. Relating this to Schelling's (1800/1978) "dynamic simultaneity of all substances" (p. 114), we can appreciate how interpretations already formed, and the relations between them, form the conditions for further productivity in the form of more interpretations.

It appears from the above quotation that the new CEO is in agreement with the State Government, but this does not imply that all employees are in agreement. This playing out is apparent in the contribution of an employee (that is a 'public servant') of Solmarco, who was formerly employed at Isengate:

Rom – if the State Government's attitude has been entirely economic and if they're not really the slightest bit interested in people who through their altruistic nature want to serve the community – If the whole thing's got to be financially viable – I don't believe that public service could ever be financially viable (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 21).

(Note: Rom qualified as a civil engineer prior to joining local government. At the time of the first interview he had been in local government twelve and a half years, with nine of those years spent at Isengate). (Note also, for the purpose of anonymity, as described above, all informants will be referred to in this thesis through use of the masculine pronouns 'he', 'his' and 'him', and through names invented for the purpose of this thesis).

In regard to the duration of the reforms we find that prior to these contributions there are State Government politicians also contributing:

The reality is that this government is on about improving the lot of ratepayers, the people who pay the bills. It is not about tugging the forelock to the union movement, as the Labor Party does .... The government is not frightened to stand up and say that it is on the side of the ratepayers because it believes the ratepayers should get the best deal and should be the beneficiaries of the savings and reforms that compulsory competitive tendering will bring in. The government is not frightened to say that. All the time it is the subject of carping criticism, but never does the truth come out – the real story. The same story was given a few moments ago by interjection from the honourable member for Preston. That was, "Oh, compulsory competitive tendering will



mean worse services for the community". That is not so (Victoria. Parliament, 1994, October 19, p. 12).

An ongoing conflict of interpretations, which is described as an extended conflict or one which is kept alive, as we have seen here in these contributions, is said by Ricoeur (1974a) to be a process which keeps tradition itself alive; in other words tradition is a living achievement. He argues that the absence of such a conflict denotes a dead tradition, and he speaks of this evocatively when he writes:

Our 'heritage' is not a sealed package we pass from hand to hand, without ever opening, but rather a treasure from which we draw by the handful, and which by this very act is replenished. Every tradition lives by grace of interpretation, and it is at this price that it continues, that is, remains living (Ricoeur, 1974a, p. 27).

For Ricoeur it is not a matter of trying to resolve such conflicts of interpretation. Rather the task is to establish the particular frameworks of pre-understanding within which our various interpretations arise, predisposing us to this or that reading of the signs (Kearney, 1994). Hence any appeal to a metalanguage of univocal meaning runs the risk of premature dissolution of the contest. It follows at a general level that the question of what it means to provide a public service contributes to the more complex debate over what it means to be human, and this latter debate is likely to continue, but also to be productive. In other words the horizon of this broader debate encompasses many concerns.

In speaking of tradition, Ricoeur (1974a) speaks of the time of interpretation and the time of transmission, in other words a tradition has a history of interpretation

but also exists as interpretation 'now'. Meaning is an achievement in the sense that it comes from the struggle between two temporalities, one transmitting and one renewing. Any interpretation pays a debt to the past (as history), while at the same time it evokes a future.

In Rom's contribution above we can begin to see that individual employees can make a response in the argument, but we shall also see that the two former organisations are an influence on how the argument is played out. Although we shall see that Anessa and Isengate could be described as being at different levels of development in regard to the argument, they were similar to the extent that they shared a history of interpretation for the notion of 'public service' at the local government level. We shall also begin to see in this part that the 'corporatisation of public services' is a trend in the field of government in Australia, and how this is defined is very much a part of the narratives which are given by the various agents. For now it is sufficient to say that broadly speaking there was a move at various levels to make the public service more accountable in the manner that businesses are seen to be accountable to a market.

From Rom we begin to gain a sense of what this means in local government.

Rom – Well, councils used to have ... what they call a dual structure. You had a City Engineer, or Shire Engineer, and you had a Town Clerk. And those two people were at the same level and reported jointly to Council. And their areas were not supposed to be complementary to one another. And all the council functions were under one of them. The Town Clerk traditionally had admin and finance areas, and the Engineer had works and mapping and planning and

areas and that sort of thing – building and that sort of stuff. And in the last 5 to 10 years most councils have gone away from that dual structure – mainly because ambitious town clerks and city engineers would be at each other's throats. You'd get certain views put, as say strategic planning decisions were made and that sort of thing. The Town Clerk would have one view on how it would be done, because of economic ramifications and the Engineer would have a different view and all this sort of thing. So councils went away from that structure and developed what they called corporate structures. I don't know why they called it corporate structures, but they put one person in charge – Chief Executive Officer or City Manager or whatever you want to call them – with major departmental heads underneath them (Interview with Rom, March 1995, p. 1).

Informants to this thesis regarded Anessa as being 'more traditional' than Isengate, partly because the latter was considered to have gone further in the process of corporatisation. The former CEO of Isengate speaks about how Isengate came to be at a different stage of achievement.

Bonna – And it seems to me ... that the whole culture at Isengate came from initiatives that you'd put in ...

Ki – Well, I think I had a lot to do with the culture that was there. Either me or the people I brought there and employed there and got into the place – yeah.

Bonna – It was very much a progressive – devolved budgets and devolved management structures –

Ki – Some would say that I devolved things and others would say that I got involved in a lot of the detail and I did. And I played both of those roles. I mean there were times when I would get involved in the detail and make sure that people actually turned down that track and when I saw them running down the track I wanted, I'd leave them to it and I'd get some other stubborn people –

Bonna – And start to work on them.

Ki – I guess I've always been a change agent, well almost as long as I can remember I've been a change agent – over certainly my working life. .... Isengate was special to me because it's the closest I've ever got to developing a learning organisation. I've gone to places and I've changed them and implemented changes, whether it be in hardware, equipment or organisation, systems or whatever. But this time I think I changed the people, and the way that people – maybe in two years time, or even in two months time, I'll go back and say I didn't achieve anything, but this time I think I came closest to changing the people so that they actually go "Ahhhhh".

Bonna – So when you say a "learning organisation" can you tell me a bit more about that.

Ki – Well, it's related to that comment that sometimes I'm managing detail and sometimes I just let them go and do things I hadn't even thought of before ... Yeah, they would grow and they'd do things beyond the things that I would have told them to do within my own experience. I think that's the most

important bit. Maybe they liked doing things that I couldn't tell them how to do because I'd never done it (Interview with Ki, January 1995, p. 6).

(Note: Ki had been the City Manager (Chief Executive Officer or CEO) at Isengate for six years, having worked briefly at another council. Prior to coming into local government he had been a manager in a large manufacturing business).

At the time of the first interview for this thesis Ki had already been dismissed from his position by the State Government, along with many other local government CEOs. About a third of the CEOs in the region, including Ki, had been appointed on an interim basis into a position as CEO at another council. Isengate, where Ki had been CEO, had already undergone reforms through Ki's leadership that brought it more into line with a corporate character or a business-like operation.

Keep reflects on this too:

Keep – Well Ki did actually have a business background. He had actually worked in the private sector, then he worked at Teiras and then I think he came to us. He brought with him a lot of his business acumen and tried to pass that on. That was appreciated. Apparently like when he first started ... he had an awful temper. .... I was shocked when I was told this ... so people weren't very impressed with him ... and also because he did bring about this business type attitude that we weren't used to. Isengate was used to a local government type attitude. So apparently it did take ... eighteen months or so it started to get behind him. So it did take a while (Interview with Keep, March 1995, p. 18).

(Note: Keep had been at Isengate for two years. He was not long out of school when employed as a local government trainee, then he worked briefly in several departments, but at the time interviews were begun for this thesis he had settled into the Human Resources Department in a clerical position).

MacIntyre (1981) argues for the necessity to envisage human life as a whole or unity, and hence the importance of not losing a sense of the social relationships which are integral to life. When he considers the intentions that persons form he argues that these cannot be characterised independently of the settings that make intentions intelligible. His use of the word 'setting' reflects a broad concern to include social settings such as 'institutions', and 'practices', but his emphasis is that human agency and suffering (as the counterpart to the action of another) occurs in a setting which has a history (MacIntyre, 1981). For MacIntyre it is through practices that people sustain their relationships to the past, present and future. While Ricoeur (1976a) posits the importance of an ongoing conflict of interpretations, and describes this as an historically transmitted cultural heritage, MacIntyre (1981) similarly argues that "A living tradition ... is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition" (p. 207). Both emphasise that it is through traditions that practices are transmitted and refigured, and that such practices never exist in isolation of larger social traditions; in effect what is constituted is a tradition of practices. In terms of tradition the horizon is conceptualised as a 'good life' as this is projected by individuals and communities (Ricoeur, 1989). In keeping with this sense it is appropriate to also note the use of 'community', which Williams (1988) traces as 'a community of interests', 'a

community of goods' and 'a sense of common identity and characteristics' (p. 75). We could say that the ongoing argument over 'how best to govern' encompasses a related argument about what constitutes a 'public service' and that this speaks to the ongoing relationship of the contributions of elected representatives at the State Government level and the administrators/public servants at the local level. Even though the truth is something that is reached for, it still shapes the interpretations that are made of it, and hence the practices of interpretation which are engaged in the pursuit of it. The shared meaning occurs at the level of the argument to the extent that agents contribute to the same argument. For example an employee as a public servant contributes by joining the organisation, and hence the field of government. When he joins the common practice of providing a public service, he also joins the argument over what that means.

For employees at Isengate there had been six years of change under Ki. He had introduced a different interpretation of public service, regarding himself as a 'change agent'. Other informants similarly described him as active and forceful in the previous transformation of Isengate into an organisation that was part-way down the track of becoming more business-like. Here he speaks of the information technology developments at Isengate which were worked on initially by information technology specialists, and of how the waste management service became proactive as a business competing with other councils.

Ki – But it wasn't just IT people. When we put those PCs in, other people cottoned on to it and started to use it – started to do things with it that [my managers] and I had never sort of thought of. I mean we put in ... spread

sheeting, mail and scheduling, things like that. And people who you may not have expected to, actually latched onto it and they started to apply it to problems that we'd been thinking about before. The waste transfer people did a – at the transfer station that we – it was a beautiful facility – cost the earth, and had been put in by councillors before me , but it was still run as a tip. It was scungy, it was closed at three o'clock just when people needed it, that sort of thing. And we started to turn that into a business and give people responsibility for it and they'd go off to the other tips and see who was using it then ring those people up and get their business and do things like that. And the customer service people they – people like Kech [who] is the admin manager – worked for Pion. Kech's a typical bloody town clerk – young bloke, but it was a narrow 'town clerk type' thing and we gave him customer service and he gradually ran with it and now he's become a bit of a rebel. I don't know whether I've done him any good. He's certainly a lot more assertive and intolerant of mediocrity and whatever than he ever was before (Interview with Ki, January 1995, p. 7).

For Ricoeur (1976a) it is within language that we raise claims to truth. Similarly, the socially embodied argument of which MacIntyre (1981) speaks revolves around these claims to truth, which we saw above he calls the 'goods' which are pursued in a particular tradition, and which give that tradition its point or purpose; "when a tradition is in good order it is always partially constituted by an argument about the goods the pursuit of which gives to that tradition its particular point and purpose" (p. 206).



Neither of these authors understands tradition as that which is opposed to reason, and they force no dichotomy between tradition and conflict, as we tend to do when tradition is confined to the notion of 'obligation to the past'. The State Government's interpretation gives prominence to the latter; a new period of economic restraint, but with sustained service levels, is presented as a departure from past practices. In addition it is implied that the State Government interpretation is the successor, not only to previous interpretations, but also to the argument itself. In other words according to their position the tradition of local government as it was is dead. In contrast to this position the authors above posit that a tradition is vital because of the conflict of interpretations; it is within this context that a person interprets, and one result of this is the living maintenance of the tradition itself. So what is being played out in local government is an argument over the kind of government that is needed at the local level, and the actions of the State Government both contribute to this argument while simultaneously denying it any credence because their own position is argued to be paramount. It will be possible to take this to another level of mediation when we later consider the notion of 'authorial strategy', but for now it is appropriate to conclude that the meaning of 'public service' is contested in the field of government in Australia and that this contest extends to both the relationship of local government to the State Government, and the relationship of employee to local government organisation.

So far it has been possible to establish through the work of Ricoeur that discourse occurs in the context of language as a world, that discourse involves processes of interpretation whereby meaning is achieved, that conflicts of

interpretation occur and that these conflicts have temporality, which has been considered with particular reference to tradition. According to Ricoeur (1989) it is this temporality which is brought to language in narrative form: "Narrativity constitutes in this way an immanent structure of life" (p. 98). Carr (1986) similarly argues that it is narrative structure that is the organising principle; it is through narrative that we bring into one grasp or one synthesis complicated sequences of events and actions. And according to MacIntyre (1981) one's ability to participate in the dialectic depends on narrative as a discourse form; one cannot make a position in an argument unless one uses narrative. For example it is through narrative that a person can make an account of what it means to be a public servant at a time when the very notion of what constitutes a public service is under intense debate. This is important in this thesis because we shall see later that in considering action and its counterpart, suffering or being acted upon, Ricoeur (1984, 1992) contends that there is a problem of identity which is central to questions in the narrative process that involve 'who', such questions as 'who acted?', 'who intervened?', 'what was done to whom' and 'on whose behalf was the action taken?'. The key 'who' question in the theory appropriated in this thesis is 'Who am I?', and it is appropriate to say that this is dialectical in the sense that we cannot contribute unless we make an account of ourselves, unless we can say 'It's me here'. We shall see that for employees like Ki, Rom and Red the double allegiance is that one belongs to language and traditions, but one also makes an account and plays the central character in that account. It is possible to appreciate this in the contributions above, as these both speak to a position on 'public service as an activity' as well as speaking to how these people interpret

themselves to be 'public servants'. In the next section we shall see that the larger organisational forms of 'social space' and 'culture' can also figure in our consideration of how employees participate in, and belong to, the temporal and spatial nature of an ongoing process of making shared meaning.

In this section we have seen how the making of shared meaning is a living activity that is ongoing in time, and that this process contributes those conditions in which new interpretations of 'public service' are achieved or could be achieved. Employees, such as Ki, Red, Dune, Rom, and Keep, are contributors to this process through membership in the tradition that is the ongoing argument over what constitutes public service activity. At the time of the merger an interpretation was achieved at the level of the State Government. According to this interpretation, employees, as public servants, could provide improved services, and deliver savings to ratepayers. Furthermore we have seen how employees are positioned in relation to this tradition, and the action of positioning that is being undertaken by the State Government at the time of the merger. But we have also seen that it is the ongoing argument, with its temporality, that enables individual employees, by virtue of their participation in the process itself, to engage in the activity of making new interpretations about their own contribution.

### **3.2 Shared Meaning: the World of Action as Social Spaces and Culture**

We have seen the temporal nature of a conflict of interpretations, but the spatial relation must also figure in this account, therefore it is appropriate to ask how any interpretation is positioned in social space. Carr (1986) contributes here when he argues for the importance of attending to space as a social form. He posits that it may

be possible to conceive of space as an empty expanse or a mosaic of points, but that it is only as an arrangement of things and places, shapes and the spaces between them, that space can figure in our experience and action. But it is Bourdieu (1991, 1993, 1998b) who has developed a more extended set of ideas to account for what he thinks of as 'social space'. We shall see in the following that he argues, in a similar way to Ricoeur and MacIntyre on tradition, that a social space is characterised by an ongoing clash of interests; in other words an ongoing argument is for my purpose a form of what Bourdieu (1998b) calls a clash of interests. Later we shall see that 'interests' are what persons pursue as exemplified in financial, social, cultural or symbolic interests.

Bourdieu (1998b) asserts that his use of 'social space' is intended to convey the relational nature of what he describes; it is a relational concept that captures in its meaning the positions and dispositions of social agents in relation to the domains of practices in which they live their lives. Hence the properties of this space can be thought of only in and through their relation with other properties. These, he argues, can be described in terms of relations of proximity, vicinity and distance, as well as through relations of order, such as above, below and between (Bourdieu, 1998b). In other words these are properties of space, including hierarchy.

Ricoeur (1995a) reminds us that "Understanding and explication without application are not interpretation" (p. 304). Stated in terms of meaning, it is clear that 'understanding' is a moment of belonging; meaning is not achieved without belonging. This return to the practical field is what Ricoeur (1989) calls the transition from semantics to pragmatics, the "situation in which the meaning of a proposition is dependent on the context of interlocution" (p. 92). For Ricoeur (1989) the practical

field at this symbolic level of meaning is 'world horizon', an horizon wherein exist "the limitation of understanding and the existence of unutilized possibilities; the latter reopen the field, reopen what I call the world horizon, which always produces an effect of withdrawal. There is therefore the dialectic of limitation and opening..." (p. 92). The argument over what constitutes a public service has agents, for example we have seen above the position taken by Rom in relation to the interpretation given at the level of the State Government. His contribution occurs at the level of practice. It both attempts to limit the meaning of what the politicians are saying, but it also opens the way to new interpretations that will keep the tradition over what constitutes 'public service' alive. Put differently, we saw above how an employee makes a contribution when he joins an organisation in the field of government in Australia, but he simultaneously joins the argument over what it means to contribute as a public servant in the field of government where the main activity is the provision of public services. We can see the position being argued by the State Government – a position that contributes to the field of government in Australia and the debate over how to govern. Rom's response is made from the position of employee. Their activity, that is both Rom's and the State Government's, at the level of general interpretation seeks to limit an understanding of public service to a particular interpretation, but of course there are differing powers among contributors in their capacity to limit future interpretations.

According to Bourdieu (1998b) the social space into which one contributes has been produced by others, and in advanced societies this space is neither absent of order nor undifferentiated. It is here that we find similarities with Ricoeur's treatment

of language. For Ricoeur a 'domain of application' has limits and this process of delimiting is one of interpretation; he speaks of a world horizon and in this regard is similar to Bourdieu (1998b) who employs the concepts of 'universe' and 'field'. In Bourdieu's project this level is present in his attention to what he calls 'the economy of symbolic exchanges' or 'the economy of symbolic transactions'. It would also be appropriate to refer to this as the 'economy of symbolic meaning', a move that remains consistent with his use of the notion of 'meaning', but also gives prominence to the common concern with meaning in both the projects of Bourdieu and Ricoeur. Bourdieu (1991) describes this level as an economy constituted by:

the symbolic struggle for the conservation or transformation of the social world through the conservation or transformation of the vision of the social world and of the principles of di-vision of this world; or, more precisely, for the conservation or transformation of the divisions established between classes by the conservation or transformation of the systems of classification which are its incorporated form and of the institutions which contribute to perpetuating the current classification by legitimating it (p. 181).

He argues that the struggle is over the symbolic power to make people see and believe. In this regard the State Government position could be experienced as a kind of limitation on what employees interpret as their position in the ongoing argument.

Grammar defines meaning only very partially: it is in relation to a market that the complete determination of the signification of discourse occurs. Part (and not the least) of the determinations that constitute the practical definition of sense comes to discourse automatically and from outside. The objective

meaning engendered in linguistic circulation is based, first of all, on the distinctive value which results from the relationship that the speakers establish, consciously or unconsciously, between the linguistic product offered by a socially characterised speaker, and the other products offered simultaneously in a determinate social space. It is also based on the fact that the linguistic product is only completely realized as a message if it is treated as such, that is to say if it is decoded, and the associated fact that the schemes of interpretation used by those receiving the message in their creative appropriation of the product offered may diverge, to a greater or lesser extent, from those which guided its production. Through these unavoidable effects, the market plays a part in shaping not only the symbolic value but also the meaning of discourse (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 38).

It is notable that the 'linguistic product' of which he speaks finds an equivalent in the notion of meaning as an achievement of the process of interpretation elaborated by Ricoeur. The hermeneutic perspective appropriated and developed by Ricoeur is also consistent with Bourdieu (1991) when he argues "As instruments of knowledge and communication, 'symbolic structures' can exercise a structuring power only because they themselves are structured" (p. 166). In other words social spaces already created then become a force themselves in the creation of new social spaces or the transformation of existing social spaces. This is important in this thesis, because for example Anessa and Isengate did exist as distinct social spaces prior to the creation of Solmarco and it is likely that there will be influences on Solmarco because of this. With regard to interpretation, any new definition of 'public service' is inevitably

linked to previous positions, even if this is to assert differences rather than similarities. The State Government can imply that the old organisations are dead and act as if they are, but the power to eliminate all living traces may not be all encompassing. This raises the question of whether the tradition of which these organisations were a part is living and the capacity for them to be a force on the conditions of their own formation, or the conditions of the formation of the new organisation. In the following we shall see that in Anessa a symbolic event was staged to mark the end of Anessa as people had known it, and that this was attended by thousands of people. But in Isengate there was an ongoing contribution, with the purpose of influencing the outcome of the amalgamation process. Both of these were actions at the level of the organisations. They can be described as achievements of coming together in shared meaning, but as we shall see below they also reflected the purposes of agents at the level of organisation which is 'the organisation'.

Across the State of Victoria the amalgamations had been achieved in stages according to regions. The assumption in an earlier Board report that the City of Anessa was part of the inner east region had galvanised the City of Isengate into action, because that left Isengate in the outer east region and from that position, even though it would remain physically or geographically the same, it could only be divided up as an electorate and distributed around to neighbouring local councils which had yet to be formed. For the CEO of Isengate the events in this earlier phase of amalgamations were a 'clarion call to battle'; there would be 'winners and losers'. He and his team of managers and the council in the City of Isengate subsequently



developed strategies aimed at gaining one result – that the City of Isengate would not be 'carved up and parcelled out in pieces'. In his own words:

Ki – Well, I suppose the whole of 94 was tied up, was absorbed or whatever, with amalgamations. It was the issue for the whole of that period and it began in about December 1993 or thereabouts when the first reference was issued by the Minister to the Local Government Board of Review in Melbourne and although we weren't involved in that reference, Anessa were, or Anessa came to be involved in it part the way through it. So when we saw Anessa were caught in that we had done our homework and decided that if it got – sort of got wrapped up in the inner reference there was a good chance that Isengate would be divided .... You see if Anessa got amalgamated with one of the inner city suburbs in the inner city round, it wouldn't have been a complete amalgamation. The proposal was to amalgamate Anessa with about one third of Nemiston, and it wasn't big enough, so the odds were that if that happened they would add half of Isengate to that and the other half of Isengate to Sabarton. So I mean we've always been a bit ambivalent – or equivocal about – "ambivalent" is I suppose the right word – whether we wanted to amalgamate with Anessa or not. It's a peculiar place, it's olde worlde and so forth, on the other hand it's got a lot of resources and things which were attractive, but we said the last thing in the world we wanted was a split between Anessa and Sabarton so we had to keep Anessa out of the inner reference. Therefore we had to mount a strategy that said Anessa is part of the outer east not the inner east and we knew that the cost of that was that we

would eventually be amalgamated with Anessa. So we developed for the whole of that year a strategy and a program of making sure that ... neither Isengate nor Anessa – were split and that the two got amalgamated together at least. You know we floated some other options, some bigger ones, for example added Bluefall to that or added Sabarton to that, but we had to be very lily white because we didn't want to – we said we [Isengate] shouldn't be split – Anessa shouldn't be split. Therefore we couldn't propose splitting anybody else. I mean it was purely self-motivated, the concept of not splitting Anessa or Isengate. But having done that, we had to be pure as the driven snow and not suggest that anybody else be split (Interview with Ki, January 1995, p. 2-3).

Ki spoke about the "enormous amount" of energy and time devoted to this unified action by Isengate and he concluded "we won" (Interview with Ki, January 1995, p. 3) because the City of Anessa was amalgamated with the City of Isengate. This action at the level of Isengate was a shared meaning as an achievement at the general level of interpretation. By staying in the argument over what constitutes public service the employees at Isengate were able to respond to the State Government actions by engaging with the latter in a direct way over the future of Isengate.

Ki – We proposed Isengate-Anessa-Bluefall, which would have been 250,000 people and said to the [Local Government] Board "You wanted an imaginative proposal – there's one". They actually came back and took our smallest proposal Anessa/Isengate, but we did succeed because we got Anessa

and Isengate amalgamated and neither of them split (Interview with Ki, January 1995, p. 3).

In Anessa a different action or positioning was taken, one that included employees as active too, but which showed shared meaning was an achievement at the level of the community of which the organisation was a part. According to Dune, an employee, the City of Anessa was united in opposition to the actions of the State Government. Their response, as a community, was to recognise that the council they had belonged to lived in the past. Ratepayers, councillors and employees of the City of Anessa, gathered together in a mourning process to mark the passing of an era.

Dune – Yes, I've never worked anywhere where there's been such a strong community spirit as here. We've put on some amazing community performances here, and everybody's been involved. It's been great. We had a salute to the City of Anessa ... to say goodbye to the City of Anessa, we had this community performance where all the local school children were in this performance and set fire to these fire sculptures that were in the shape of horses, with – one of the horses had a wing on it's back and as it set fire it looked as if the horse was flying off into the distance. And then we had fireworks and everyone was involved in these performances. (Note that there are symbolic links here to a notable landmark in the City).

Bonna – Oh. That's almost like a public grieving.

Dune – Oh yes. And before that too, we got all of these community groups – over fifty community groups - to decorate these bamboo wreaths, I suppose. We called them circles but they were really wreaths. We got them to decorate

them with flowers and a group came up with a bit of music, a bit of goodbye music, I suppose, and we put all these wreaths on the Nesia Lake, and had people holding candles, and it was quite a touching sort of ... I mean it sounds really weird and pagan, but it was great. No it wasn't pagan, it was a real saying goodbye to the city .... And there were about 3000 people involved in that particular performance. Yeah it was really amazing .... Just about all of the councillors were involved and all of the city managers, and I think it was good for them too .... Lots of staff members. Some staff members from different departments made these flower circles too. It's a good thing to do I think (Interview with Dune, May 1995, p. 21).

(Note: Dune had been employed at Anessa in a middle management position for four years at the time of the interview).

At this level of general interpretation these symbolic exchanges show that although the Cities of Anessa and Isengate took differing actions in relation to the State Government actions, the living process is similar. Within each organisation there was some shared meaning over what the amalgamation meant for the future, even though there was not yet shared meaning over what the City of Solmarco would become. But we could also say on the basis of the above that within the City of Anessa this action that showed solidarity was public, but more passive in character than what was happening in the City of Isengate.

Ki – Well from what I saw of the Anessa people they didn't want the amalgamation at all ... it frightened them to death. Right up until the last week they were very difficult to negotiate with about getting ready for

amalgamation. They were frightened of being taken over, as well they might ... which was a shame, because there were some good people there. If they had been more self-confident of themselves I think they might have taken a more positive role, more positive – not role, but more positive attitude, more positive stance.

Bonna. Do you think that was coming down from the top?

Ki – Yeah, all the way from the [Anessa] Council. I mean I think [their CEO] was bloody terrible in preparing people for change and his councillors for change. I mean it wasn't councillors that decided to amalgamate with Isengate ... but back in December 93 I had a bunch of councillors [in Isengate] who said "this shouldn't happen, no need for it to happen, we won't be amalgamated" and all that sort of guff. And we had others that were being very negative and head in the sand like the Anessa people right up until the end. Anessa were negative right up until the end, but back in 93 we had Isengate councillors who were pretty negative about any change or the need for any change. But you have to work on them to bring them round. And of course one of the possibilities out of this whole thing was that Isengate would be split. So even though our program said Isengate mustn't be split it was possible that Isengate would be split because Anessa were still – right through until the final report came out – ... campaigning for a split of Anessa. There was a distinct possibility it might happen then. So what we had to do was not only work to make sure it happened [the way we wanted it to], but also prepare the staff and the community to respond positively if it wasn't going to.

Now Anessa had such a negative approach – they had so many losers (Interview with Ki, January, 1995, p. 10).

The 'losers' he intends here are losing positions in the debate. The City of Anessa had originally wanted to stay in the earlier round of amalgamations and join one of their other neighbours. Right up until the end and the decision to create the City of Solmarco, there was a group of ratepayers inside the City of Anessa who were still campaigning to join this other neighbouring City. They asserted that they had more in common, which we could interpret as shared meaning, with this neighbour and not with the rest of the City of Anessa.

Ki – They tried to split [the other neighbour], they tried to split Isengate, and in the end they just fought off an attempt by a dissident group to split Anessa.

Bonna – So they didn't have any preferred option?

Ki – They only had one preferred option and that was to stay as they were, which was ridiculous. I mean it was a loser, and everything else they picked up was a born loser, it just couldn't happen but they kept digging in, digging in, digging in, telling people how terrible this would be and then when the real threat to split Anessa came from within their own city they were powerless to do anything about it. They couldn't agree to oppose. They couldn't agree to support the amalgamation with Isengate and they couldn't agree to oppose the splitting of Anessa.

Bonna – So the council couldn't agree and nor could management?

Ki – Well, of course eventually at the end ... I mean there was a certain point at which managers have got to tell Councils the facts of life. Now there's a risk in doing that .... but Jesus there was no risk here. It was three, four weeks or something to amalgamation and they could never have fired [their CEO], they could never have fired anybody. I mean when the end of the world is nigh you may as well tell people what you think of them .... or where they should go .... when the thing you dislike most is about to happen then there's nothing to be lost by telling people they need to change their strategy to ameliorate the effects of that or win something out of it, if you can (Interview with Ki, January, 1995, p. 10).

This suggests that from a different position, that of Ki, there was no shared meaning in Anessa about how to act towards the State Government as a united position with a desire to influence how the debate was progressing. The shared meaning we saw above in Dune's account was about being more passive, about conserving and establishing shared memories. For Dune the mourning event is a product that stands as a marker in a temporal sense. In Ricoeur's (1998) terms we could describe this as a kind of coming together through the horizontal forces that work to bring people into proximity. From Ki's position the activity at the level of the City of Anessa is construed as resistance to what is happening. What is important for this thesis is how the complexity of these symbolic forces become a limitation for employees as they live in their own accounts of their contribution to the debate. At the time of the amalgamation no one position was likely to be able to make an account of all these positions of shared meaning, and that in itself was a kind of constraint. During the

months of the amalgamation the uncertainty over what constituted 'public service' was a kind of semantic uncertainty and the only shared meaning that provided a reference point for both councils was that put by the State Government. As the latter was actively engaged in the process of imposing certain meanings, we could conclude that they intervened in the activity of making shared meaning at the level of 'the organisation'. Any presupposition that the field could be autonomous through the ongoing argument 'public service for the sake of public service', was being challenged (Bourdieu, 1993, 1998b).

Certain concepts are developed and used by Bourdieu to elaborate on the nature of these symbolic exchanges. An important concept is the aforesaid notion of social space, which for Bourdieu (1998b) is an "invisible reality that cannot be shown but which organises agents' practices and representations" (p. 10). As we shall see, he develops this to enable the study of agents in relation to social processes; so for example he contributes a description of the process whereby social agents, construed as 'person' or as 'collective', become positioned with regard to the characteristics of social space. As seen above this is important to the extent that both employees and the agent of transformation, in the form of the State Government, contribute to the argument over how to govern and from this larger process comes the interpretations of what it means to be a 'public servant'. In this thesis it is the positioning of public servants, as employees, that will be given prominence. We shall see, when we come to the narratives of informants, that this in part will be seen to speak to their sense of self.



We have seen above that for Bourdieu (1998b) 'social space' is a relational concept that captures in its meaning the positions and dispositions of social agents in relation to the domains of practices in which they live their lives. The properties of this space can be thought of only in and through their relation with other properties (Bourdieu, 1998b). He argues that social space comes to exist as a collective work of construction which is "inseparably theoretical and practical" (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 32). This work is undertaken by a group of persons who are "mobilized by and through the defense of (their) own interests" (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 32). Hence the success of such a group depends on the symbolic work, not only of constitution but also of consecration, which is necessary to create a unified group. It is the proximity in the space of social positions, combined with the interests and dispositions associated with those positions, which enable agents to mutually recognise each other and recognise themselves as part of the same project; agents both belong to social spaces and are positioned by them.

Bourdieu develops our understanding of social space through the concepts of class and field, although it is the latter that is of interest in this study, mainly because an organisation will be considered here as an enterprise and according to Bourdieu (1975) an enterprise is a sub-field. In other words an organisation can be understood in this context as a space of positions or position takings, but also as belonging to larger forces of positioning.

Later we shall see how Bourdieu accounts for the positioning of agents through the distribution of different kinds of capital or wealth. For now I shall limit the description to his concept of a field of power as a social space.

Bourdieu (1998b) uses the concept of a field as a key concept in his work, one which he develops in order to account for what he refers to as "structural effects which are not otherwise easily understood", especially what he calls "practices and representations" (p. 33). He argues that a field is constituted in social space as a sphere of life, hence he speaks of the fields of art, science, religion, the economy, and politics. Using the analogy of a 'game' or 'struggle', Bourdieu describes how these fields operate as a system of social spaces which are peopled by social agents or 'players', represented by institutions or individual actors. These players compete for a stake in the field, hence the description 'force' fields (Wacquant, 1998) or 'field of forces' (Bourdieu, 1998b). Even the very constitution of the field and the rules can be in dispute. Wacquant (1998) argues that within Bourdieu's theory a field is "like a battlefield in which the basis of identity and hierarchy are endlessly disputed" (p. 222). In other words, a field "imposes its specific determinations upon all those who enter it" (Wacquant, 1998, p. 221). Hence a field, as a social space, is both a field of forces and a field of struggle and this struggle is "aimed at transforming the relation of forces which confers on this field its structure at any given moment" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 171).

Bourdieu develops these ideas by arguing that what is at stake in a field is the struggle to gain a share of scarce and/or contested resources, and that there is a certain logic to the game or struggle, one which is characterised according to the specific field and the logic of the rules of the game of that field. He argues that stakes of play are constituted in particular forms of interest, for example in the artistic field in the Nineteenth Century 'pure art' was regarded as the only true form of art and an agent

who pursued an interest in 'commercial art' was distinguished by not being accorded legitimacy in the game. (Note that according to Williams (1988) 'interest' is a word with specific legal and economic senses which have been extended to a very general meaning. The origins of the word come from two sources, the first being to be between, to make a difference, to concern, and the second related to compensation for loss, the latter being the link to the act of investment in economic terms. Prior to the Seventeenth Century there was reference to an objective share of something, and the extension of this – a natural share or a common concern. The notion that an interest is something that attracts our attention is quite recent. The formal distinctions in these meanings are not clear according to Williams. Bourdieu's use of the word seems to bring them together).

In Bourdieu's project a field is considered to have a degree of autonomy:

Every field is thus the site of an ongoing clash between those who defend autonomous principles of judgement proper to that field and those who seek to introduce heteronomous standards because they need the support of external forces to improve their dominated position in it (Wacquant, 1998, p. 222).

The semi-autonomous nature of a specific field is circumscribed by the activity of agents who marshal these external forces to their advantage. Forces external to a field would be those constituted in other fields. For example in this thesis the field of interest is government, but those agents who emphasise economics and the appropriation of economic goods could be regarded as arguing a contrary position to those who regard public services as not having to be economically viable.

In challenging the distinction between government and business, certain agents may be contributing to arguments that transcend the fields themselves. We saw that Rom takes a contrary position to his employers because he upholds what he asserts are accepted ideas about 'public servants' and what they do. That is, Rom is questioning the argument that public service is about making money. In his position we saw that public services can never be money-making activities.

It could also be argued that a strategy of the State Government in this economy of symbolic exchanges is to leave their own interpretation of 'public service' unclear, so that they can continue to define it. We can see from their report that they argue that services will remain of similar quality, even though the financial commitment will be reduced. This ambiguity invites the activity of interpretation, not just by the State Government but by other players or agents who have an interest in the game of symbolic construction.

In summary we can see from the above that Bourdieu offers a concept of social space that enhances our understanding of what Ricoeur calls the 'practical field', and that this field is constituted by an ongoing argument which is itself structuring of the field. But before moving on we can consider other ideas Ricoeur (1998) offers which can be grafted onto the understanding of how the field of government operates. Specifically he refers to the tension between the vertical and hierarchical forces inherent in social structures, particularly as this applies to social institutions. He argues that vertical forces are in tension with the human desire to come together, what he calls the horizontal forces of shared lived experience (Ricoeur, 1998) and we have seen this above – that shared meaning can be a kind of

triumph of these horizontal forces even when this shared meaning is positioned in the space of meaning as 'resistance'. He also argues that the conflict of interpretations has form:

We can define political power as the set of organized practices relating to the distribution of political power, better termed domination. These practices concern the vertical relation between the governing and the governed as well as the horizontal relation between rival groups in the distribution of political power (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 257).

We saw above how the mourning event in the City of Anessa reconciled various disparate groups – councillors, ratepayers and employees including managers. At the level of Anessa (as an organisation) this acceptance of a kind of death could have been a way for the community members to symbolically respond to the vertical forces of domination in favour of a communal or shared meaning about what constituted the truth. For them this event of shared meaning suggests a reconciliation and a desire to move on by closing the past and symbolically releasing the players in the space of meaning that was the City of Anessa.

By pointing to the function of discourse and its contribution to the process of reducing possible interpretations Ricoeur also contributes to our understanding of field in another way. An example of what he calls the "reductive action of contexts" (Ricoeur, 1978a, p. 127) is the different strategies employed in the use of ordinary (or everyday) language, scientific language, and poetic language. In ordinary language the strategy is to reduce misunderstanding in everyday life, and the control achieved is reflected in the capacity for misunderstanding to be a regular presence,

nevertheless. In contrast, Ricoeur argues that scientific language is characterised by a strategy of eradicating polysemy in order to reduce ambiguity. The use of words in science is controlled and the result is a restriction in the room available for interpretation (Ricoeur, 1978a).

Poetry, by contrast, leaves extended room for interpretation and the presence of multiple layers of meaning attests to the courting of ambiguity. Later we shall appreciate how the one who reads is invited into a creative role which is central to the understanding of poetry, hence the overt purpose of the poet could be said to be the engagement with the reader in a joint achievement of meaning. The importance of this example can be appreciated when we consider that managers could not only aspire to have control over who their employees are, they could also participate in creating new spaces of meaning in which employees can re-invent themselves. These two activities could be in balance with each other, albeit that balance is one of creative tension.

Ricoeur argues that these differences reflect different aims, for example if the purpose is to ensure that the meaning of a word remains the same from the beginning of an argument to the end, such as happens in science, then that may be quite a different purpose to that pursued in literature where communication is the purpose, not argumentation. What interests Ricoeur (1978a) is how contexts establish the conditions of creativity to foster diverse activities such as poetry and science. Equally we could ask about the conditions in which employees engage in creativity in their own lives. In this regard the dynamics of language, tradition, and field can be considered formative.

Also, with respect to practices, Ricoeur (1989) argues that it is important to consider the hierarchical structure of complex actions as those that deserve to be called 'practices'; these are exemplified as technical skills, jobs, arts, and games. He argues that these:

... consist of chains of action displaying relations of coordination and, above all, subordination; thanks to the structure of "embedment" proceeding from the latter, practices may in turn be included in plans of life, ordering professional life, family life, leisure, social, and political activities (Ricoeur, 1989, p. 98).

The actual practice of public service would also be an influence on the argument in this regard. For example Rom's own interpretation of 'public service' is part of how local government has developed. The practice of managing the land, which is exemplified in such activities as planning and approving building developments and infrastructure, is for Rom the core of what public servants at the local level do.

Rom – Councils are basically a land management authority. ... all the community services stuff came along later, but that's the core focus of the Council that I see (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 3).

So far this thesis has been about 'shared meaning' and how this could be said to be achieved in terms of the dynamics of language, tradition and social field, where these are understood to be living and actively emergent. Although it is not my intention to exhaustively describe these processes, and even less is it my intention to retrieve a definition of 'public service' when it is clear that this is contested, it is nevertheless apparent that a return to the notion of culture is warranted. As seen

above in Part 1, prominence is accorded to 'organisation culture' in the literature on mergers, and this is linked to the presence of 'shared meaning' at the level of the organisation.

In discussing culture, Gare (1996) argues for an understanding of culture as an emergent being, and he does this on the basis of Hegel's description of three ongoing interdependent dialectical patterns, characterised as 'symbolic representation' which operates through the medium of language, 'interaction on the basis of reciprocity of recognition' which operates through moral relations, and 'the labour process' which operates through the tool. These patterns form the dynamics of societies, and can be seen to be compatible with what is said above about ongoing conflicts or dialectics of interpretations. Specifically Gare (1996) argues that it is through these dialectics that we can re-evaluate the conflict which has been apparent between the sciences and the humanities, a legacy of which has been a misunderstanding of culture as an emergent being. Gare (1996) attributes to this the presence of conditions whereby we have no way of evaluating new ways of arguing; he argues that any new conflict of interpretation which involves new ways of arguing cannot be evaluated in terms of existing criteria, so for example the privileging of 'being' over 'becoming' which has been a characteristic of certain positions in scientific thinking, such as those promoted by positivistic science or 'normal science' in management studies (Marsden & Townley, 1996), neglects to account for how we, as beings, are part of the reality that science purports to investigate (Gare, 1993).

Honneth (1996) also construes culture in this way, arguing that the various patterns of recognition distinguished by Hegel, when conceptualised as the



intersubjective conditions under which persons achieve new ways of relating positively to themselves, extend our understanding of the conditions required for the process of 'self-realisation'. Hence self-confidence is gained in the realm of the family and the experience of love, self-respect is gained in the experience of legal recognition, and self-esteem is gained in the experience of solidarity. He argues that success in these, cast as love, rights and solidarity, is central to self-realisation. He states that these "do not represent established institutional structures but only general patterns of behaviour, [hence] they can be distilled, as structural elements, from the concrete totality of all particular forms of life" (Honneth, 1996, p. 174). This can be understood as being consistent with the ideas considered above as 'solidarity' is akin to belonging; that is we could say that one gains recognition in fields, in languages and in traditions, all of which are distillations of these patterns of recognition. As such these distillations themselves also belong. According to Honneth (1996) this is a "relational network" (p. 178), and furthermore he argues that the "pattern of social solidarity ... can only grow out of collectively shared goals" (p. 178). He too is concerned to capture that sense of struggle which we saw above in the work of Ricoeur and Bourdieu: "the widest variety of life-goals without losing the solidarity-generating force of collective identity-formation" (Honneth, 1996, p. 179). According to Honneth (1996) it is through culture that we "radically expand relations of solidarity" (p. 179).

From the above it is apparent that traditions, fields and culture can be described in terms of large scale temporal and spatial ordering processes, and that both persons and organisations belong to these larger wholes that are themselves

actively emergent. We have also seen that it is 'ongoing argument' that is at the centre of this understanding; both forces and struggle are involved. Activity has been understood with regard to both the process of interpretation (Ricoeur, 1974a) and the process of positioning (Bourdieu, 1998b). A field is construed as an ongoing clash of interests, which in the field of government is partially constituted in the symbolic struggle over what constitutes a public service (Bourdieu, 1975, 1998b). Particular actions, such as that of the State Government, are construed as part of larger wholes in the form of ongoing discursive practices. Shared meaning is construed as an achievement, that is a 'product' in Schellingian terms (Schelling, 1800/1978), but also as the activity of belonging to, or having membership in, a particular argument. Relating this back to the literature on mergers and the construct 'organisation culture', it is contended that both the 'symbolic process' and the 'objective entity' discussed by Frost et al. (1985) are present, but it is the process that links them creatively that is of interest.

What remains at the end of this part, is to make the connection to narrative theory. Each of the major authors so far referred to above, with the exception of Bourdieu, demonstrates how narrative opens a way forward from this point. Of them all it is MacIntyre (1981) who most clearly evokes the reason to attend to the importance of narrative. As noted above, he achieves this with his contention that regardless of which side of a dialectic one is positioned, one cannot make a case for one's position in the argument unless one uses narrative as a form of discourse (MacIntyre, 1981). We could add that one couldn't interpret the position of an opposing force in the argument unless one was competent in narrative operations.

On the basis of the foregoing it is argued that we could include living traditions and social spaces in our thinking about mergers. This shift could enable prominence to be given to narrative activity, as well as the making of shared meaning and positioning. It is argued that this move provides an opening to extend the literature and consider the lived experience of a merger and an actively emergent self at a time of organisational merger. It could be that it is through narrative activity that people are able to bring within one grasp, or one action, a sense of their own place in the simultaneous, but complex, activity going on in traditions and fields. A capacity to 'make a contribution' to the ongoing argument and one's place in it could depend not only on the narrative conditions in which one finds oneself, but also on one's competence to take a position in the ongoing argument. Furthermore, one's level of membership in the argument, as construed through the theories of positioning offered by Bourdieu (1998b), could also be part of these complex dynamics.

It should also be said, that so far in this thesis we have already read some narratives, particularly those contributed by informants. These could have some capacity to stand alone, but they must also be understood as smaller parts of larger narratives, and the larger dynamics of the level of general interpretation. We have seen that particular interpretations, when related in narrative form, are actions that have the potential to limit other interpretations. In the Schellingian sense these narratives are products of narrative activity

Before making the move to consider narrative activity, it is appropriate to draw attention to how this thesis provides another level of mediation in regard to the activity of reading it. It could be argued that what is provided above has a complexity

that is easily resolved through provision of a simple narrative that could orient the reader regarding what happened in the merger of these two organisations, Anessa and Isengate. But instead of this movement, which is one of reduction, I have given prominence in my account to the complexity itself, and how the making of shared meaning is an activity that contributes to language, traditions, social fields and culture as living processes. We could say that during the period of the merger shared meaning could be achieved that would bring together Anessa and Isengate into a new response to the position of the State government, but that this response itself was emergent at the time and could only be enabled by virtue of the 'belonging' that was possible in the relationship of organisation to field. Furthermore we could say that employees were living inside these dynamics. By refraining from giving a reduced telling or simplified explanation, which I acknowledge could give readers some relief, I am drawing attention to what it could be like to be inside the lived experience of this merger as an employee and be both constrained and enabled in one's capacity to make an interpretation of 'it's me here'.

In the next part it will be possible to consider in an abstract sense how narrative activity is central to this process of making meaning. We have seen that there is productivity present which could lead to new achievements, in particular interpretations that call for narration, and later in this thesis this will be developed further in relation to the personal accounts contributed by informants. For now it is sufficient to argue in this thesis that the State Government imposed certain interpretations of 'public service' onto local government and this worked to constrain other interpretations that could have emerged, particularly at the level of activity that

could be construed as being 'the organisation'. Employees could have been enabled by virtue of their participation in the field and its tradition, but they could also find themselves positioned as passive by the State Government to the extent that they were members of organisations that were merged by the actions of the State Government. Furthermore, their purpose to work as a public servant was being defined according to economic values invoked by the State Government in the latter's interpretation of 'public service activity'.

In respect to the reading of this thesis it is acknowledged that the synthesis achieved so far could have much wider application in management studies, well beyond the scope of the current research question. While for example much more could be said about the action of organisational merger, it is the emergent nature of self and employees as processes of becoming that is of more interest. Therefore the intention in this part has been to set the scene in a manner that is adequate to introduce the reader to a consideration of narrative activity and the contribution that narrative activity makes to narrative identity. As we have seen emphasised above, narrative activity will not be presented in this thesis as an activity that occurs in a vacuum, but rather as an activity that contributes to and is shaped by larger processes such as the making of shared meaning.

In this part we have seen how the making of shared meaning, in this instance the ongoing argument over what constitutes public service activity, is formative of the field of government in Australia, and that in turn the interpretations that are achieved in this process contribute those conditions in which new interpretations of 'public service' could be achieved. Employees, such as Ki, Red, Dune, Rom, and Keep, are

contributors and live inside this process through membership in the social spaces that are achieved within the tradition about what constitutes public service activity. At the time of the merger an interpretation was achieved by the State Government, and as we have seen above, that interpretation was imposed on local government organisations which were already existing at the level of sub-field. The conditions for this action were present in the relationship of organisation as sub-field to the field itself. These social spaces at the level of organisation, construed as Anessa and Isengate, enabled individual employees, by virtue of their participation in the process itself, to engage in the activity of making new interpretations about their own contribution. But we saw that different interpretations were made as the ongoing argument took different forms of achievement in the two organisations. While the interpretations of employees are mediated by their position (in either of Anessa or Isengate), they are nevertheless enabled to act because they share a space of activity and a tradition at the level of the field. In other words because the joining of the two organisations brings the two sub-fields into one at the time of the merger, employees are enabled to make interpretations in regard to the sub-fields as they were and the new sub-field as they foresee it could become. We could furthermore say that the new sub-field of Solmarco was in the process of being formed, and we have seen above some of the forces, both temporal and spatial, that influence the relationship of the level of activity that is field and the level of activity that is organisation.

## Part 4 Narrative Activity

### 4.1 Narrative as Process and Product

Stories, as narratives, are a major feature of our lives from a very early age. Children are willing audiences for the stories told from personal knowledge or from the well-established store of written or oral literature. Bettelheim (1975) argues that narratives in the form of fairytales are essential in the development of children because in order to find deeper meaning, one must be able to transcend the narrow confines of a self-centred existence and believe that one will make a significant contribution to life. This belief is mostly a belief in a capacity that may not exist until some future time, but it is nevertheless a capacity that the child can begin to develop through the stories of her culture, stories which posit that a rewarding and good life is possible in spite of the adversities that can be encountered along the way. Bettelheim (1975) argues that a child without fairytales lacks the means to make sense out of the problematic nature of life and is not assisted to develop a rich imagination, and MacIntyre (1981) similarly argues that depriving children of stories leaves them "unscripted anxious stutterers in their actions and their words [and that] there is no way to have an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources" (p. 201).

The importance of this kind of cultural participation is emphasised by Bruner (1990) who argues that it is by virtue of our participation in culture that "... meaning is rendered *public* and *shared*. Our culturally adapted way of life depends upon shared meanings and shared concepts and depends as well upon shared modes of

discourse for negotiating differences in meaning and interpretation" (p. 12). He argues for the importance of focussing our studies on "those meaning-making and meaning-using processes that connect man to culture" (Bruner, 1990, p. 12) – in other words, narrative. Similarly Polkinghorne (1988) argues that "Narrative recognises the meaningfulness of individual experiences by noting how they function as parts in a whole" (p. 36). For Jameson (1981) narrative is not just a literary form or structure, it is an epistemological category similar to the Kantian concepts of space and time. He argues that the world comes to us in the shape of stories and it is hard to think of the world as it would exist outside narratives. MacIntyre (1981) posits "I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'" (p. 201). And Barthes (1977) tells us

The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. ...[N]arrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, drama, comedy, mime, painting ... stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation ... [N]arrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself (p. 251).

Gare (1993, 1996) argues that these authors are both representative and important because they draw attention to the centrality of narrative as a cultural form. He suggests that their writing stands in stark contrast to the devaluation of narrative which has come about as a result of the positioning and privileging of science in opposition to the humanities.



In arguing that narrative is primary to the transactions of daily discourse, Ricoeur (1984) defines narrative through emphasis on the activity of making a synthesis or a 'grasping together' of the heterogeneous within language.

With narrative, the semantic innovation lies in the inventing of another work of synthesis - a plot. By means of the plot, goals, causes, and chance are brought together within the temporal unity of a whole and complete action (Ricoeur, 1984, p. ix).

Ricoeur (1984) also enhances our understanding by arguing that narrative shares similarities with the discursive formation of metaphor.

It is this synthesis of the heterogeneous that brings narrative close to metaphor. In both cases, the new thing - the as yet unsaid, the unwritten - springs up in language. Here a living metaphor, that is, a new pertinence in the predication, there a feigned plot, that is, a new congruence in the organization of the events (p. ix).

Both have the capacity of 'seeing as', and both serve a process of semantic innovation, for metaphor at the level of word and for narrative at the level of the entire sentence. This capacity for semantic innovation relies on the imagination, but beyond this similarity of the two discourse forms Ricoeur argues that metaphor is distinguished from narrative in the sense that a metaphor involves new semantic pertinence which relies on the resistance of the words to their ordinary use; there is a displacement that prevents a literal interpretation and at the same time enables a new thing to spring into being in language. For example we saw above how Dune described the activity of mourning the City of Annessa as 'pagan'. Such a metaphor

speaks to what would be considered now as primitive ritual and perhaps adequately captures that association of the past and the present, but at the same time the metaphor has the resistance to that part of 'pagan' that speaks to 'uncivilised'; Australian public servants are unlikely to present themselves as uncivilised. Valdes (1991), following Ricoeur, argues that with metaphor "the gain in meaning is caught in the conflict between 'same' and 'different,' it is unstable and volatile" (p. 14), and hence there is a tension between being and not being. While narrative shares this process of innovation, that is, a process of innovation or creativity is present, by contrast to metaphor, that which is newly invented in a narrative relies on a process of emplotment to create new understanding. As we shall see below the definition that Ricoeur gives highlights the integral relationship of emplotment to action.

To develop his theory of action, which is first extensively treated in the three volume work Time and narrative, Ricoeur (1984, 1984, 1988) takes as his starting point Aristotle's concept of mimesis which he argues is encompassing of all narrative activity. Mimesis, which can be taken to mean a process of imitating or representing something, is extended by Ricoeur to include the active invention of something new. He refrains from rendering 'mimesis' as mere 'imitation' because there is a sense in which the audience is living inside the experience. A tragic narrative, when it is for example played out on a stage in drama, can lead to an audience member having a living experience of tragedy. Hence we have Ricoeur's statement: "Plot, says Aristotle, is the *mimêsis* of action" (Ricoeur, 1984, p. xi), and the argument that builds on this that mimesis is a series of operations, whereby what is produced in the action is an organisation of events by an emplotment which is not a copy or identical

replica, but a new emplotment of events. We shall see below that the three senses of mimesis for Ricoeur (1984) include these operations: a reference back to the familiar pre-understanding we have of the order of action – in other words the mimetic function of plots takes place in the field of action with its temporal dimensions; followed by entry into the realm of composition; and finally the achievement of a new configuration that refigures the pre-understood order of action and contours the field of action such that the process is a spiral linking back into itself.

The dynamic nature of the emplotment process is central to Ricoeur's theory, and he emphasises that it should not be confused with the actual structure of a narrative (Ricoeur, 1984). Emplotment is a process which enables individual agents to interpret and understand events which happen in the world of action. Ricoeur (1984) argues that our pre-understanding of the world of action through its meaningful structure, its symbolic resources and its temporal character is grounded in the operations which make up the process. In other words the world of action has some structure, it does not enter our experience unstructured. As we have seen above, Ricoeur makes the presupposition that we do not live in a vacuum, separated from language and the symbols that find expression through language, rather he argues that we live within language and it is through the process of emplotment that the meaning of experiences comes to be apprehended. We have similarly seen that Bourdieu (1998b) argues that social spaces have symbolic order and that we do not act outside of meanings already produced.

In Time and narrative the Aristotlean concept of emplotment and the Augustinian analysis of time become the seeds for Ricoeur (1984) to undertake

considerable development of narrative theory, the result being a major work exploring how narrative is related to time. In this project Ricoeur (1984) considers how "... time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (p. 52).

In everyday language we are told that action is a "process of acting, exertion or influence", that it is associated with "doing", with a "series of events represented" or operations, with "movement" and with "engagement between opposing forces" (The Australian concise Oxford dictionary of current English, 1987, p. 11). Ricoeur (1992) speaks of a 'notional network of action', which is more encompassing than empirical definitions given in scientific language (for example he cites the use of 'behaviour' in psychology and 'conduct' in the social sciences as being included in the network but not capturing of the whole meaning of 'action'), and whose members consist of other notions such as circumstances, intentions, motives, deliberations, voluntary and involuntary motions, passiveness, constraints, intended or unintended results and so on. He also, like his contemporaries in philosophy, includes discourse events as actions. He further links 'action' to the process of answering questions centred on who, what, why, when and how. In other words he reminds us that "action is that aspect of human doing that calls for narration" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 58). In the following I shall consider what Ricoeur has to say about narrative making as an action itself, one which brings about order or form as an achievement of the process of emplotment. This is necessary in order to give prominence to narrative as a process

in the Schellingian sense, that is, that productivity consists of opposed activities limiting each other (Schelling, 1800/1978).

As Ricoeur employs the analogy of texts and readers in the elaboration of his narrative theory, it is appropriate to briefly describe some of the terms he uses before proceeding to a more detailed consideration of narrative operations, although it will be possible to revisit this in more detail below under the heading of a theory of reading. We shall see in the following that 'text' is broadly understood by Ricoeur to encompass that which is achieved in the process of narrative making. A text therefore can take a variety of forms, as in for example a memorial or a document or a drawing. Such texts have duration and existence in time, and are semi-autonomous in the sense that there is freedom for texts to enter into relation with other texts. Ricoeur argues that a text is a world and that when we speak of the world of the text and the world of the reader, this enables us to attend to the relation of the one to the other, hence the 'reader' in Ricoeur's theory is also a broad concept which captures a sense of the one who interprets. Ricoeur (1995a) argues that we interpret texts, events, institutions, and personages (including persons, fictional characters and roles). It is important to emphasise how he presents both text and reader as being in dynamic relation to each other, so for example a text is both closed and open to interpretation; rather than have a fixed meaning it is part of a dialectical process of inventing or achieving new meaning. For example this thesis is a text in narrative form, and as such it is a contribution to a reading experience. Very early in its life as a text it is read for the purpose of examination, and will be interpreted in regard to that action. The meaning achieved as part of the process of writing is still partly unresolved until it is overcome

by another product, for example in the form of the judgement of an examiner (Shelling, 1800/1978). Even the latter, as a text, is a resolution that becomes part of further processes, albeit for some purposes closure is achieved.

Using this analogy of reader and text, Ricoeur (1984) argues that human experiences, grounded in the world of action, take on the nature of pre-narratives. These pre-narratives are in a state of prefiguration, and their articulation becomes the narration of an experience, which he calls configuration. Once narrated, the possibility exists for refiguration, or reauthoring. In terms of relationship these are the three moments in the mimetic operations which make up the process of emplotment. These enable us to be conducted "from one side of the text to the other" (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 53) through the action of reading (where reading is a mediator in a process). Ricoeur (1984) argues that configuration and refiguration have a faculty of mediation enabling a work to "lift ... itself above the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby change their acting" (p. 53). Because it is the reader who takes up the unity of the traversal from prefiguration (mimesis<sub>1</sub>) to refiguration (mimesis<sub>3</sub>) by way of configuration (mimesis<sub>2</sub>), this being done by the action of reading (Ricoeur, 1984), and because Ricoeur argues that narrative is central to human endeavours to make sense of the world, it is important to elaborate these operations before continuing.

Ricoeur (1984) argues that experience is first apprehended in 'prefigured' form; it comes as "narratives in the making" (p. 57-58). This is because life itself has a pre-narrative character, and human experience is not a series of disconnected

events, but rather has some order. This order enables us to begin the process of making sense.

He describes an agent as having experience which is grounded in a relationship with a cultural setting, or a practical field. This cultural setting or practical field is a shared reality, one which has order and structure which Ricoeur describes in terms of language, convention and norm. As a setting it is the source of pre-narratives, and has characteristics which influence prefiguration. To begin, on the level of language, a familiarity with terms is presupposed; in other words the meaning of terms and symbols is to some extent assumed. Secondly, narratives are about 'doing something' so we can say that the minimal narrative 'A did B to C in the manner of D' has action as its theme; it is about the world of action. Thirdly, there are rules within the practical field for narrative composition and the mastery of these is assumed. There are rules for narrative composition, grammar, syntax and ordering, including diachronic ordering. For Ricoeur (1984) when we understand a narrative we understand both the language of "doing something [and] the cultural tradition from which proceeds the typology of plots" (p. 57).

Ricoeur (1984) contributes to our understanding of culture by arguing that conventions, beliefs and institutions make up the symbolic framework of a culture; he argues "Before being a text, symbolic mediation has texture" (p. 58). In other words symbols confer an initial readability on action taken by virtue of their cultural context. We saw this in the previous part of this thesis in regard to the activity of the State Government, Rom, Dune and Ki. By virtue of their context in the social space

of field their actions can be interpreted in the light of what constitutes a 'public service'.

And finally the practical field is textured by what Ricoeur (1984) calls 'norms'. These are like codes of behaviour which give form, order and direction to life.

In this way Ricoeur demonstrates that action within the practical field or cultural setting can never be neutral; it is always symbolically mediated. Much of the character of a cultural setting continues to exist, according to Ricoeur (1984) "at the price of a complete re-arrangement of the system" (p. 58). Given that this re-arrangement is unlikely, the setting is the source of important forces that influence the process of narrative making.

Later, after publication of Time and narrative, Ricoeur (1995c) argues that experience is present as the 'little stories' of everyday life and that this experience is not pre-narrative in character but rather is already narrative in form, and later again he notes that his treatment of 'prefiguration' still requires considerable enrichment and further work (Ricoeur, 1997). It will also be possible shortly to consider how Carr (1986) and MacIntyre (1981) contribute to our understanding of action and narrative, but for now I shall confine this description of the operations as Ricoeur elaborates them. In this regard prefiguration is succeeded by the operation of configuration.

The 'configurational' act is one of composition or 'grasping together'. It is an act which extracts a configuration from what is otherwise a succession of events (Ricoeur, 1984). In the series of operations, it is configuration that is the turning point or crucial pivot. It is the mediation between prefiguration and the rest of the process. "What is at stake ... is the concrete process by which the textual configuration



mediates between the prefiguration of the practical field and the refiguration through the reception of the work" (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 53). This moment of articulation may have a range of expression including speech and writing, and it is through this expression that configuration opens up the experience, which itself has come in pre-narrative form, to the process of emplotment.

This step is mediating in three ways. Firstly it mediates between individual events and the story as a whole. Secondly, it brings together the heterogeneous factors involved, what Ricoeur (1984) calls the complexities of concordant discordance, and thirdly, "it draws from this manifold of events the unity of one temporal whole" (p. 66). Furthermore, in the operation of configuration there is the expectation that the process of emplotment will have an end point, a conclusion to the process from which it can be perceived, even momentarily, as forming a whole. The conclusion occurs at the third operation, but is expected during the second. It is at this step that we can speak of imagination in the sense that an act of configuration is the work of the productive imagination (Ricoeur, 1984). This imagination is not only rule governed; Ricoeur (1984) argues that it "constitutes the generative matrix of rules" (p. 68). The imagination synthesises in a narrative way which connects understanding and intuition such that Ricoeur (1984) argues it is possible to speak of "a schematism of the narrative function" (p. 68). This schematism in turn is constituted within a tradition, where tradition is understood as an interplay of temporalities as we saw in Part 3 above. Note that this can also be described as the interplay of innovation and sedimentation; that is, there is a history of interpretation in conflict with 'interpretation now' (Ricoeur, 1991h). Beyond this Ricoeur (1984) argues that

tradition in turn is referenced to paradigms which encompass form, genre and type, and that paradigms constitute the "grammar that governs composition of new works" (p. 69). This narrative tradition enriches the labour of imagination in the operation of configuration. In terms of the process, configuration gives way to the next operation which is refiguration, or mimesis<sub>3</sub>.

'Refiguration' or re-authoring "marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader" (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 71). It is the intersection of the world as configured by the text and the world of action, or it can be understood as the return to the world of action by the individual agent or reader: "narrative has its full meaning when it is restored to the time of action and of suffering in mimesis<sub>3</sub>" (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 70). Entry into a practical field in this sense involves entry into a field of references which themselves are part of the process. (Note that 'suffering' in this context is to do with the counterpart of the action of another; it is the position of being acted upon. This is a broader concept than that found in everyday language. In the Schellingian sense 'being acted upon' could be taken as passivity, although the duration of passivity as a position in a social space would also have to be taken into account; passivity may be a momentary position).

An example of refiguration is the capacity to make a narrative or invent a new plot from the same events, but to lead to different actions; for example a person in therapy who configures and subsequently refigures important events in her life achieves a new synthesis involving connections not made before. This occurs because of the elevation of sub-plots or other ways of refiguring meanings attributed earlier (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995; Parry, 1993; White,

1995, 1997). Ricoeur (1984) emphasises that the circle, or more properly spiral, of narrative making is endless in the sense that we "carry the mediation past the same point a number of times, but at different altitudes" (p. 72). Reauthoring involves taking an active part in the authorship of our own lives, and I propose to return to this later when it will be possible to further consider the activity of reading as the mediator in the capacity of a plot to model experience.

So far in this part we have seen that narrative making is an action itself, one which is productive in the sense that a narrative is achieved. We can appreciate from what Ricoeur argues that narratives lead to further action, and the narrative process has a 'Who?' in the sense that someone is engaging in the process; we shall see in the following that the 'someone' can be characterised as a reader. Added to this we shall see later that narratives which are about action also have characters and narrators. But by considering how action itself is ordered there is more that can be said about narrative.

Carr (1986) contends that the overall temporal structure of action is narrative in character; life is an inchoate narrative. Human reality is not just a sequence because it can be demonstrated that narrative coherence inheres in "even the most elementary experience or action" (Carr, 1986, p. 88). Narrative coherence is "an essential structural feature of the very fact of *having* an experience or *performing* an action" (Carr, 1986, p. 88). Hence order is present in events even before a narrative is imposed on them, and "the real difference between 'art' and 'life' is not organization versus chaos, but rather the absence in life of that point of view which transforms events into a story by *telling* them" (Carr, 1986, p. 59). It is this emphasis on narrative

activity that we also find in MacIntyre (1981) when he argues that "Narrative is not the work of poets, dramatists and novelists reflecting upon events which had no narrative order before one was imposed by the singer or the writer; narrative form is neither disguise nor decoration" (p. 197). For MacIntyre human actions are themselves enacted narratives. Later we shall see that this is important to this thesis. In living out a life a person acts, and it is in this performing that we achieve a 'grasp' at the level of attempting to make meaning or sense of relationships (Carr, 1986).

So we can see that with regard to narrative as a mimesis of action, it is appropriate to consider how Carr (1986) extends our understanding of action through his emphasis that action takes place in time and therefore has both temporal and practical order that someone experiences. This order can be understood in terms of several forms: firstly as closure (beginning, middle and end); secondly as departure and arrival, or departure and return; thirdly as means and end; fourthly as suspension and resolution; and fifthly as problem and solution. These features describe not only the manner in which actions become coherent wholes, but also elaborate our understanding of narrative operations as described in Ricoeur's argument that narrative is a mimesis of action. According to Carr the act of narration does not just impose a structure, the structure is already to an extent present in human experience. Narrative structure therefore "pervades our very experience of time and social existence" (Carr, 1986, p. 9). As described by one of Ricoeur's translators "narrative has a plot because it is mimetic, and it is mimetic because it has a plot" (Pellauer, 1997, p. xiv). Narrative making is a meaningful action.

Carr (1986) further argues that when we limit our consideration to 'human experience' then the focus is on events as experienced and that experienced time is a structured and configured time. Such experience can be described as both passive and active, with active experience being characterised by a complex temporal structure. He argues that action is a temporally extended structure which occurs in a configured sequence and as such is grasped as a whole. Using the Husserlian analysis of temporality he proposes that it is through a retentional-protentional grasp reaching forward and back in time that we achieve closure and it is this which separates the event or action from its surroundings; in other words the closure yields a whole which is internally articulated into its constitutive parts.

For Carr (1986) it is in acting that we 'protend' or 'intend' a future goal; it is as if we are located at the end of an action because the focus of our attention lies in the future, on the work to be done. The future goal towards which our intention is focussed organises us towards a kind of predicament or problem, which acting has to solve, and it is on this basis that we can say that the phases of an action have both temporal and spatial order. Protention thus enables the future to be envisaged along with the present and the past, and this still occurs even if the whole and unified action stands vulnerable to future disappointment or to surprise.

To summarise, it is possible to appreciate through Carr that action and events are phenomena of whose parts, in their temporal and practical arrangement, an agent has a protentional-retentional grasp which is further characterised as a changing and flowing grasp, since the whole is grasped successively from each of its parts. Carr (1986) extends this to note that an agent can have different perspectives from within

this grasp; these perspectives can change with respect to changes in temporality. When he argues that the difference between art and life is narration he not only extends our understanding of Ricoeur's argument that life is an untold story, but he further highlights the shift to 'telling' mode when we have the positioning of those who have a 'point of view' as in storyteller, audience and characters. Ricoeur similarly argues that narratives are about action and have authors, characters and narrators; that is they involve human agents.

For Carr (1986) it is through narrative that we act to bring about a future in the sense that an agent intends a future. Fields and persons have futures and both are argued about and we have seen that this is a temporally shaped movement with powerful forces of endeavor and struggle. Later we shall appreciate through Ricoeur's theory of reading that we cannot only be the author of our own lives because we are always caught up in larger narratives, some of which we shall see are in the process of narration which is ongoing in the field and organisation in which we work. To be caught up in a new narrative that local government is now a business, when one is still comfortable with being an author and character in the previously dominant narrative that local government is a public or civil service, is to be influenced by certain strategies.

For Ricoeur, too, it is through narrative that we act to bring about a future in the sense that an agent intends a future, and we have also seen that emplotment is a productive process and that what is achieved is a narrative. Valdes (1991) suggests that for Ricoeur the game we play is that of worldmaking, and with regard to this activity we have seen in Part 3 how chains of actions become practices in the sense

that the world of action has temporal, linguistic and spatial order. On the basis of the foregoing description of narrative making, it is appropriate to build on Ricoeur's contention that our experience of the world of action is prefigured. We saw above that in our experience the world is apprehended in prefigured form; we belong to narratives because we are born into a world of action. Even before we are born there are stories about us and the world, stories which will both enable and constrain our becoming and that of others, but we also have human experiences which have temporal and practical order inherent in them.

There is another quality of narrative activity that remains to be emphasised in this chapter and that is relationship at the level of parts and wholes. The action of narrative making cannot be understood by an approach that privileges the characteristics of parts, and suggests that a whole is simply an additive of the parts themselves. The limitations of such an approach are demonstrated by the narrative theorists in the contention that there is a meaning inherent to the whole which is not comprehensible at the level of parts. MacIntyre (1981) deplores the tendency to think atomistically about human action and to analyse complex actions and transactions in terms of simple components. He argues that particular actions derive their character as parts of larger wholes, but that a characteristic of prevailing modernist perspectives is that this is largely treated as an alien concept.

Emplotment is an operation of synthesis that contributes to meaning at the level of the whole. This activity achieves a synthesis out of heterogeneity in three ways according to Ricoeur (1991g). Firstly there is a synthesis which brings multiple events or incidents into a complete or singular history; the transformation proceeds

from manifold happenings to a story. An event then is something that contributes to the progress of the story as well as its beginning and end, and narration in turn organises events into an intelligible whole. Secondly, a plot is a synthesis because unity is achieved through bringing some concordance to what is otherwise discordant. Included could be that which is widely divergent such as circumstances, agents, actions, and those who suffer them, interactions ranging from conflict to collaboration, means that may or may not contribute to ends, and what Ricoeur (1991g) calls "ends that were not willed" (p. 426). Thirdly, a synthesis occurs in regard to temporality because a narrative is a mediation between time as flux and time as duration. "If one would speak of the temporal identity of a story, one must characterize it as something which endures and remains right across that which passes away" (Ricoeur, 1991g, p. 427). Citing Aristotle, Ricoeur reminds us that every well-told story teaches us something because stories reveal universal aspects of the human condition. Narrative activity becomes the means by which we engage in thought experiments enabling us to join together the ethical aspect of human activity and happiness/unhappiness, fortune/misfortune.

It is notable that the ordinary language definition of "to relate" accords it equivalence with "to narrate" (Australian concise Oxford dictionary of current English, 1987, p. 931). This highlights the confluence of action, narrative and relationship which is considered above. We have seen from Carr that actions have order and we have seen from Ricoeur that narrative is a mimesis of this order. We have seen that the world of action, to which we belong, comes to us in pre-narrative form and that the mimetic function takes place in a field of action. We have



considered in Part 3 how both persons and organisations belong to temporally extended complex actions that can be regarded as practices in the living forms of traditions, social spaces and culture.

Narrative activity can also be thought of as a mediation between the general level of interpretation where we 'make sense' and the activity of achieving concordance out of what can otherwise be experienced as discordant. As such it is a human activity. What is achieved has three features according to Carr (1986). Firstly a good story is authored such that extraneous noise or static is cut out and the audience is told only that which is considered necessary to further the plot. Secondly, a selection is made of all the events and actions the characters may engage in. The contrast between the story and life suggests that in the latter all is left in. According to Carr (1986) the first of the features leads to the second.

The selection is possible because the story-teller knows the plot in a way both audience and characters do not (or may not). This knowledge provides the principle for excluding the extraneous. The narrative voice ... is the voice of authority, especially in relation to the reader or listener. The latter is in a position of voluntary servitude regarding what will be revealed and when. Equally important, the narrative voice is an ironic voice, at least potentially, since the story-teller knows the real as well as the intended consequences of the characters' actions. This irony is thus embodied primarily in the relation between story-teller and character; but it is related to the audience as well, since their expectations, no less than those of the characters, can be rudely disappointed (Carr, 1986, p. 58).

Thirdly, the ironic stance is a function of one's temporal position in relation to the events in the story. We have seen that the State Government was the author of the reports on local government reform, so we could conclude that they had a position in the field consistent with authorship from a powerful position. We shall see that at the time of the merger this ostensibly left employees in either a 'character' position or a 'reader' position, or perhaps to a greater or lesser extent in both. These ideas will be developed further under the heading of a theory of reading, but from the few points above we can appreciate that passivity is at least a possible position to take with respect to the actions of the State Government.

By now it will be apparent that 'lived experience' is construed in this thesis as the complex dynamic of those forces already considered above. Later I shall consider how larger narratives, once achieved, can be said to undergo transformation, that is narratives which are achieved as part of the dynamics of traditions and social spaces. It is these larger narratives that catch up employees, particularly when those employees find themselves as 'characters' in narratives that are authored from symbolically powerful positions in the field of government. Being cast as a passive character could be a limit or a constraint on that activity which enables one to respond to the question 'who am I?'.

So far in this part narrative activity has been considered as central to human activity. We both live inside this as a form of productivity *and* achieve texts that have narrative form (being mindful that 'text' broadly conceived includes the quality of fixity akin to that achieved in the act of writing). This is a creative process, engaged in by agents that we can ask about through the question 'who?'. The achievements of

this process both enable and constrain further action and central to this is a series of narrative operations. As life has narrative coherence, narrative is mimetic of action, and furthermore action calls for narration because narrative structure is inherent in action. But we have seen this process is productive, and can be seen to be so if we use an explanation of it that is abstract.

#### **4.2 Designating Persons in Language**

A consideration of the agent (as reader) starts with how we use language to designate what it means to be human. For Ricoeur (1989) it is at the level of language that the distinction is made that persons are a different kind of being from animals and things, and then in considering the human being as the subject matter of philosophy Ricoeur (1989) argues that the question "What is a human?" follows on from a series of prior questions: "what can I know? what must I do? what am I allowed to hope?" (p. 100). He argues that to begin exploration of this we should start with the progression from 'persons' to 'selves' at the level of language. In other words there is a further distinction to be made when we move from the designation 'persons' to the designation 'selves', and it does not just represent a move from one level of discourse to another. In terms of semantics there are rules which pertain to designation of individuals. Hence Ricoeur argues that it is at the level of semantics that we are able to designate individuals although it cannot be said at this level that these are 'persons' because persons are individuals of a certain kind.

We can designate a person and distinguish that person from all the others. "To identify persons as individuals constitutes the most elementary and abstract step of a philosophical discourse about humans" (Ricoeur, 1989, p. 91). Persons are not

already selves at this level of discourse. It is in the move from semantics to pragmatics that a person is immediately designated as a self – in other words both a speaker and addressee are self-designating and this also applies to third persons, the persons about whom we speak. As soon as the word 'I' is uttered by someone there is designation of one and only one person, that is, the one who uses it. An utterance as in 'I promise...' is an event in the world whereas the speaking self is not an event; it cannot be said to occur in the sense that an event occurs. 'I', as in the limit of the world of I, is then connected with a proper name which designates a real individual belonging to this world. Ricoeur contends that we secure this connection by the calendar, as in a 'now' of a living date, and also a 'here', as a place in geometrical space. In other words we locate a person in time and space by naming; the 'I' is inscribed in the social map. We thus designate a person as someone existing in the world, and the connection between speaking subject and acting subject then occurs at the crossing point between semantics and pragmatics.

The process of identification begins with the ability to distinguish one individual from another. The semantic distinction at this level involves entities which are 'referred-to' in the sense of third person (he she) in discourse and the designation 'my body' indicating possession. It is in making the transition to pragmatics that meaning becomes context dependent and the use of 'I' and 'You' become pertinent. It is at this level of pragmatics that the term 'I' designates one and only one person, the one who uses it. Hence there is a uniqueness. Ricoeur (1989) argues "Self-identification is nothing else than this correlation between self-designation and referential identification" (p. 94).

In moving from linguistic analysis to phenomenology, Ricoeur argues that the claim 'my body', and its connection to the world of events, can only be understood in terms of relationship, that is, when articulated in a semantics and a pragmatics which reflects the double allegiance involved. He argues that in this sense, 'my body as mine' shares the status of the ego as the limit reference-point of the world, hence there is convergence between linguistic analysis and phenomenology.

Ricoeur (1989) argues that the connection of speaking subject and acting subject occurs at the crossing point between semantics and pragmatics; human action is spoken action. At this point phenomenology, in the sense of 'I can', constitutes the connecting link between an agency which is 'ours' and a system of events which occurs in the world. In considering whether humans can be praised or blamed for their actions, what he terms a moral dimension of imputation, he argues that both the linguistic and the practical aspects of selfhood are presupposed by such judgement. In order to expand this category of action, he argues it is necessary to consider the hierarchical structure of complex actions we have seen above described as practices, the temporality brought to language in the narrative form, spoken in the sense of the narrative unity of a life, and the references of plans and practices of life to the horizon of a 'good life', as this is projected by individuals and communities.

At the level of moral imputation, he contends that we evaluate our own actions, that is we interpret our own selves in ethical terms, and that secondly, all action is interaction. Action not only has dialogical structure, but when we have personal interaction it is appropriate to say that someone exerts power over someone else. The asymmetry, that exists in terms of action in relationship, is the basic feature

of an occasion for using the other as an instrument. At the level of evaluation, self-esteem is the subjective correlate to moral obligation, as in treatment of other as if the other is self, and this brings into consideration the notion of self-respect. He argues that there is no self-respect without respect for the other.

We must be capable of describing persons as basic particulars and selves as self-designating subjects of discourse in order to be able to characterize actions as intentionally-brought-forth events, and agents as the owners and authors of their actions; and we must understand what agency means in order to apply to actions a moral judgment of imputation and to call persons responsible selves (Ricoeur, 1989, p. 100).

We thus make the progression: from persons to selves as beings self-designated in discourse.

Having established a basis for understanding self at the level of language, it is now appropriate to consider how narrative operations involve a 'who'. Later, I shall more fully account for this in terms of 'readers' and 'authors', and it will be clear that narratives also have characters.

'Person' is used above to indicate one human being, whereas 'agent' is used in the sense that a person is an agent, but a group is also potentially an agent. 'Self', which has a broad and deep history of usage in disciplines such as psychology, is used in the next section in line with the work of Ricoeur (1992), who posits a dialectical movement between 'sameness' and 'selfhood' at the level of person. 'Individual', when used as a noun, is taken as equivalent to 'person' for my purposes, although the complex history of use for this word, as shown by Williams (1988), is

acknowledged. Both 'self' and 'identity' will be used in this thesis according to narrative ideas, wherein it is argued that the dynamics at the level of communities are not dissimilar to those for the level of person. Following Schelling (1800/1978), the activity of self-organisation is operational at complex levels of organisation, including both 'a person' and 'the organisation'.

In this section the notion of person is defined at the level of language and according to the work of Ricoeur. Persons become selves through the operation of self-designation in language. This enables the next move in this thesis, to a consideration of Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity.

#### **4.3 Narrative Identity: a Project of Self-Understanding**

In the third part of this thesis we considered employees as contributors to the process of interpretation that Ricoeur argues is operational at the level of a general theory of interpretation.

In considering action and its counterpart, suffering or being acted upon, Ricoeur contends that there is a problem of identity which is central to questions in the narrative process that involve 'who'; such questions include 'who acted?', 'who intervened?', 'what was done to whom' and 'on whose behalf was the action taken?'. These questions pertain to self or selfhood, and Ricoeur (1984, 1985, 1988, 1992) addresses the problems they raise by extending narrative theory to account for identity.

The key 'who' question in this thesis is 'Who am I?', and it is appropriate to say that this is dialectical in the sense that we cannot contribute unless we make an

account of ourselves, unless we can say 'It's me here'. And the double allegiance we make, is that we belong as we have seen to language, traditions, social spaces and culture, but also we live out this account as a developing project or becoming-text. We both make an account, and are ourselves the central character in that account. As we saw above, the action of composition is central to the narrative process which is an integrating process – "By integrating process I mean the work of composition which gives a dynamic identity to the story recounted: what is recounted is a particular story, one and complete in itself" (Ricoeur, 1991g, p. 21). And of course Ricoeur is not the only author for whom life is a story or stories is posited. Carr (1986), MacIntyre (1981), J. Bruner (1986, 1990), Polkinghorne (1988), Freeman (1993), Kerby (1991), and White (1995, 1997) are among those who contend that we have a sense of our own identity which is narrated into existence.

In Time and narrative, Ricoeur (1984, 1985, 1988) argues that the reality of who we are, the answer to the question "Who?" is the telling of the story of a life, an identity that is negotiated in dialogue with other people. In Oneself as another, Ricoeur (1992) extends this idea to posit a restoration of a concern with human agency and suffering to what he calls 'practical philosophy', a response he argues is necessary if we are to move beyond the present polarisation between the exalted subject of the Cartesian tradition and the shattered subject of Nietzsche and Deconstructionism. (Note this polarity is taken in this thesis as the modernist position and its counterpart postmodernism, as seen in Part 1 above, where a more detailed consideration of the complex history of this tradition was undertaken).



Ricoeur (1992) suggests, for a person, that there are a series of dialectics at work in the process of narrating an identity. Firstly, there is a dialectic of explanation and understanding, whereby a process of interpretation involves a threefold movement of interpretation, understanding and explanation. In other words a person interprets a symbol, understands it and then explains its meaning; he argues that this happens regardless of whether we privilege one or the other of two kinds of events - interpretations or facts - because both are present and part of one set of operations. Secondly Ricoeur attends to the importance of the dialectic between self and other, which he suggests is multiple in the sense that it is characterised by experience of one's own body, the self of reciprocity or dialogue with other people, and the dialogue with what can be thought of as the 'other within'. The last, he argues, is experienced as conscience. Thirdly there is the dialectic of identity, which is shaped by narrative in time. Each of these contribute to what he says is a dynamic relationship between sameness and selfhood, by which he means that we can be identified in time as the same person, but we also change over time as we develop selfhood.

For Ricoeur (1984), reading is the mediator between the poles of phenomenology on the one hand and of semantic structure on the other. He argues that the latter can be described in relation to authorial strategies, the semi-autonomous nature of the text, and a theory of the reader's response to the author and text.

Early in his project Ricoeur (1991f) concentrates on a hermeneutics of the symbol, and words and sentences as the units of meaning, but later he argues that the text is a good paradigm for human action and that action is a good referent for texts that are in a narrative form because these are about action. He thus shifts to a

hermeneutics of the text on the way to developing a hermeneutics of action. By shifting to the text as a larger unit of meaning, he brings the action of reading into view (Ricoeur, 1991k). Because the relationship of text to reader is a complex one, and Ricoeur (1991a) argues that the author of a text sets out with a strategy to persuade the reader, I shall introduce here what Ricoeur offers us when he uses the term 'text'. From this position it will be possible to elaborate on the dynamics of reading and the strategies that are brought into the threefold relationship of authors, readers and texts.

We have seen how Ricoeur argues that meaning is an achievement of the interpretive process, and from his later work we can see that a text is an achievement of the narrative operations that are described above. In describing a text as an achievement certain characteristics of the text become clearer, characteristics which are not so apparent when we are confined to a narrow definition that a text is a written document which stands alone as a product that is cut off, both from the relationship to its production and the mode of its use. Rather than treat a text as an object, Ricoeur emphasises that what is present is a dialectic of objectification and understanding which is first understood at the level of the text.

It is at this level of text that we are able to speak of a unit of meaning as having a semi-autonomous existence. A text is to some extent detached from the conditions of its production, but it is not completely autonomous. Rather it is a mediation in three dimensions: between man and world, between man and man, and between man and himself. According to Ricoeur (1991g) the first mediation is referentiality, the second is communicability and the third is self-understanding. For

Ricoeur (1974a) hermeneutics describes, as well as the interpretation of texts, the whole activity at the point of intersection of the (internal) configuration of the work and the (external) refiguration of life.

The reader of the text is absent when the author is writing, but we can also speak of the absence of the writer at the event of reading. Ricoeur (1991k) argues that a text replaces dialogue that would otherwise connect the voice of one to the hearing of another. This semi-autonomy is analogous to fixation by writing to the extent that Ricoeur argues that we can use 'fixation' to encompass all comparable phenomena in the sphere of the transmission of discourse. As we saw earlier discourse is language as event or language as used, but discourse which is fixed in a manner analogous to writing signals the presence of text. In this way Ricoeur (1991h) extends the concept of 'text' to include all document-like objectifications. Fixation is more to do with autonomy of the text than it is to do with what constitutes the text. So it is apparent that a text is a semi-autonomous achievement of discursive operations and that it is available to be read in another place and time by an audience. For Ricoeur (1995a) this is the semantic autonomy of the text. Appropriation by the reader as audience, which will be discussed below, is the counterpart of the semantic autonomy of the text (Ricoeur, 1976a). On the way towards appropriation the reader interprets the text through the mediation of reading (Ricoeur, 1991b).

A text transcends its own production, specifically it transcends the psychological and sociological conditions of its own production. Ricoeur (1991k) contends that this semantic autonomy is threefold in nature. Firstly there is autonomy from the intentions of the author, in other words what the text signifies to is no longer

what the author intended; we could say that the author has limited control over the meaning that the reader appropriates. Secondly a text becomes autonomous with respect to the cultural situation and the social conditions which pertained at the time of production, and thirdly the audience for whom the text was written is transient; unlike dialogue, the original addressee is no longer present. Ricoeur (1991e) argues that "The work itself creates an audience, which potentially includes anyone who can read" (p. 298), and he suggests that a text is open to an unlimited series of readings.

This openness to interpretation is what recontextualises each reading in the series of readings, which is another reason why Ricoeur speaks of the text as having only semi-autonomy. Great texts, such as those of Shakespeare, are open to recontextualisation through new audiences, and new reading encounters, and the closure which is achieved in such texts is only temporary. Ricoeur (1981) argues that it is at the level of the text that we can best understand human objectification in the form of structural explanation and the hermeneutic understanding which is the counterpart of such explanation.

It is at this level, the level of a hermeneutic of the text, that the relationship of the world of the text and the world of the reader is of primary interest. The text does not contain a self-enclosed world in which we as the reader go seeking only the intentions of the author, rather it is a proposal for a world, a projected world that we as reader are invited to inhabit (Ricoeur, 1995a). Ricoeur (1991i) speaks of the world in front of the text as what we interpret, rather than what is behind the text: "[T]he world of the text is not a self-enclosed entity, rather it points to a possible world 'a

world I could inhabit, where I could actualize my own possibilities in so far as I am in the world" (p. 349).

By extending these ideas on reading to a hermeneutics of self-understanding, Ricoeur is able to argue that identity is both a temporal structure which rests on narrative, as well as being a project which is ongoing for individuals during their lifetime. The centrality to this project of reading, and the reader as agent, is emphasised by Ricoeur (1991g), when he argues that it is only in reading that the dynamism of configuration completes its course; in other words the passage from prefiguration via configuration to refiguration results in transfiguration of worlds. In this relationship of worlds, it is the person as reader who takes this journey of reading (Ricoeur, 1988). His thesis is that "the process of composition, of configuration, does not realize itself in the text but in the reader, and under this condition configuration makes possible reconfiguration of a life by way of the narrative" (Ricoeur, 1991b, p. 430). As part of this a person can be called upon to make an account of herself (MacIntyre, 1981), and such an account, Ricoeur argues, involves a positing of a beginning, a middle with its highs and lows, and an ending. Through composition, or configuration, this account is dynamic in that we can weave different plots about our lives. Ricoeur (1988) reminds us "Just as it is possible to compose several plots on the subject of the same incidents ... so it is always possible to weave different, even opposed, plots about our lives" (p. 248). But simultaneously a life can have the quality of being singular and complete. As a hermeneutics of self-understanding, this is best captured by Ricoeur (1991b) when he argues:

To understand oneself is to understand oneself as one confronts the text and to receive from it the conditions for a self other than that which first undertakes the reading. Neither of the two subjectivities, neither that of the author nor that of the reader, is thus primary in the sense of an originary presence of the self to itself (p. 17).

For Ricoeur, the task is one through which we achieve, by effort, a dynamic balancing of a sense of self, which is on the one hand unified and semi-autonomous at the level of a social structure, and on the other incoherent and seemingly located at the intersection of many different stories, some of which see us cast as a character in other people's stories. Ricoeur (1978a) argues that it is through this process that we become self-human and adult, by appropriating meanings which reside 'outside' or have been objectified, in the works of culture, and through making those meanings into our own version of meaning. That is, we make an intelligible or meaningful account of ourselves.

Ricoeur (1988) captures the dynamism of this project when he argues that "Narrative identity thus becomes the name of a problem at least as much as it is that of a solution" (p. 179). In other words there is a constant question to be answered, 'Who?'. We act on that question from the perspective of our position in history and culture, that is, from within the circle of interpretation, which was construed above as a world of action with temporality in the form of traditions, and ongoing practices in the form of fields.

In this section we see how living beings, construed as employees/informants, are actively emergent beings living out a process of narrative identity. We have seen

that for Ricoeur (1992) there are a series of dialectics at work in the process of narrating an identity. Firstly, there is a dialectic of explanation and understanding, secondly the dialectic between self and other, which is multiple in the sense that it is characterised by experience of one's own body, the self of reciprocity or dialogue with other people, and the dialogue with what can be thought of as the 'other within' or conscience, and thirdly there is the dialectic of identity, which is shaped by narrative in time. Each of these, according to Ricoeur, contributes to a dynamic relationship between sameness and selfhood, by which he means that we can be identified in time as the same person, but we also change over time as we develop selfhood.

## **Part 5 A Community of Action: Economic Rationalism as a Living Narrative**

So far we have considered the conditions for a hermeneutics of action to be played out in regard to the making of shared meaning, and we have also considered a hermeneutics of narrative and how this enables a process of becoming to be emergent at the level of a person. We have understood the notion of 'product' as that which is achieved through this productivity; that is, for a person a narrative account is achievable in response to the particular "Who?" question, construed as "Who am I?". From this position the research question in this thesis involves an inquiry into the conditions in an organisational merger that could both constrain and enable this developing project of narrative identity on the part of employees. In order to continue with this inquiry we must attend to the relationship of employee to organisation, and the relationship of organisation as sub-field to the field itself.

We saw in the previous part that a text does not contain a self-contained world, and that the reader is not extraneous to that activity that is in process at the level of 'text' as 'becoming-text'. Nevertheless, the bringing together of the social theory of Bourdieu (1998b), with the narrative theory seen in Part 4, shows that it is necessary to account for an authorial strategy that seeks to create and position a text, thereby making a claim on its behalf that a self-contained world is present and that this world prefigures a life to come. According to Ricoeur (1984) there is both a structural identity for a narrative as well as the truth claims that that narrative work makes. It is to this idea that the present part is devoted. When employees are



construed as processes of becoming they both live inside the productivity that is present at the level of 'becoming-text', and have a text imposed on them that makes certain claims. According to Ricoeur (1984) the world unfolded by every narrative is always a temporal world. In other words the event of merger is a temporal event that occurs in the time of a life, and through an unfolding narrative this conjunction can be organised. We can ask about who is doing this organising.

Having said this, it should be stressed again that there is no purpose in this thesis that seeks to isolate and analyse particular achievements in relation to their process of becoming. Achievements do no doubt exist; examples could include the narrative-making spaces of Anessa and Isengate, the Middle and outer Melbourne final report (Victoria. Parliament. Local Government Board, 1994) that was published by the State Government, or success as measured by financial or annual reports. But there is no intention to apply narrative analysis to these in a manner that considers only the qualities of these as products. Neither is there any intention in this thesis to give prominence to deconstruction of texts in a manner that suggests an alternative future is possible in isolation of the conditions that might make such a possibility emergent. Rather, it is the hermeneutics at the level of narrative that will be attended to, and importantly attention will be devoted to the theory of reading as an analogy for action. In other words authors, readers and texts are in relationship, and it is reading as the mediator of this relationship that is of interest. At the time of the merger the State Government was in a powerful authorship position, hence their strategies can be considered in this part. It will be seen in regard to a hermeneutics of narrative, that the process of becoming for employees and the process of becoming

for Solmarco were dynamically linked, and the conditions introduced by the State Government from the level of field were central to this relationship and furthermore an influence on the employee's capacity to engage, via the level of activity that is 'the organisation', in refiguration of his/her own life.

In Part 3 of this thesis employees were described in terms of their contribution. In action terms they were described as 'contributors' to a process of making shared meaning, but the move to emphasise narrative activity brings with it a deepening of this idea about agency, based on Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity. Employees, according to this theory, are engaged in narrative making and reading, and these are central activities in human transformation. In the abstraction shown above as narrative theory, that which is being read is construed through the notion of 'text', and we have seen that texts have certain qualities as 'products' in the sense intended by Schelling (1800/1978). It is to this idea of text that this part is devoted, but it will be posited that while there was a text in the form of a State Government position, as can be seen in their reports and contribution to parliamentary debates, this text also had a life that was open to reading by employees. By emphasising Carr (1986) it is possible to give prominence to how employees were living inside the 'becoming-text' at the level of employee/organisation relationship.

As there was a richness of narrative activity that was there for reading while the merger was underway for employees, it is argued that research could seek to account for this. A thesis that proceeds to distinguish the presence of two organisation cultures as a basis for arguing that the employees from Anessa and Isengate were facing different challenges (Cartwright & Cooper, 1996), is too narrow for the

purpose of engaging with the research question asked herein. It is argued that the capacity for employees to 'act back' in a purposeful way in regard to the process of forming of a new organisation, and possibly a new sense of self, would be difficult to research given this reduction. The challenge in authorship of this thesis, and one that provides a challenge for readers of it as well, is to give prominence to both the narrative activity that is present in the merger and the narratives achieved as products within the social space; in other words a hermeneutics of narrative takes centre stage.

If we are to suggest, based on the theory above, that employees could have or could generate a complex grasp of what is occurring, then we should be interested to explore how employees are processes of becoming living in relation to the organisation, also construed as a process of becoming. Later, in Part 6, it will be possible to give emphasis to this reading that employees make of their own position, their membership in the space, and their 'time of a life'. In other words the text of their life as a process of becoming can be given prominence in regard to life as so far achieved and life protended, or 'a world in which I might live'. It will be seen that the activity of belonging to social spaces and tradition, that we saw partially elaborated in Part 3, can be taken up in regard to individual employees. But in this part the intention is to consider how employees could find themselves in the organisation as a process of becoming that is both enabled and constrained in relation to what Schelling (1800/1978) describes as the dynamic of activity/passivity.

As we saw above in Part 3, the intentions of the State Government are expressed in text form. Their own interpretation is regarded as stable and having autonomy from any activity that could position a different interpretation as privileged

in the ongoing argument over what constitutes public service. In other words one of their authorial strategies is to create and impose a particular text, as a product in narrative form, and to argue that this has stability in relation to the narrative-making space of the organisation, Solmarco. It seems unlikely that employees, when posited as processes of becoming, could have achieved at the time of the merger a complete or stable grasp of their own position that was consonant with what the State Government had imposed. Nevertheless we can consider how their own level of narrative competence could enable this grasp itself to be in formation, as we shall see in the story parts given in Part 6.

In the State Government report there is a claim that local government is reformed from what it was. According to their account local government is to be more accountable to ratepayers through the intervention of the State Government, and we shall also see that market forces are to be influential in the ideological position of the State Government. In Part 1 above I noted that this was a 'conservative' government so it is appropriate to ask about this. In everyday language 'conservative' is defined as "tending to conserve", "averse to rapid changes", or "allowing only minor changes in traditional ritual" (The Australian concise Oxford dictionary of current English, 1987 p. 217). A conservative political party is construed as "that which is disposed to maintain existing institutions and promote individual enterprise" (The Australian concise Oxford dictionary of current English, 1987 p. 217). And yet the State Government of Victoria undertook major reform of local government, and employees could both read the State Government position in their reports, but also live inside this major reform. This suggests that what was being conserved could be

more complex than these definitions suggest, and that 'reading' was the activity called for on the part of employees who were actively engaged in their own process of becoming.

### **5.1 Communities of Action**

According to Gare (1996) persons' lives can be understood as acts of short duration compared to the evolution of stories, and according to MacIntyre (1981) living traditions "continue a not-yet-completed narrative" (p. 207). The organisation as a narrative-making space also exists in time; both an organisation and a field in this sense have tradition. In this not-yet-completed narrative the future derives its meaning from the past, and MacIntyre (1981) argues that a tradition which is in good order is always partially constituted by this ongoing argument that is about the "goods the pursuit of which gives to that tradition its particular point and purpose" (p. 206). He suggests that persons living within a tradition should be enabled to pursue both their own good and the goods of the tradition, but this depends on such a person having an adequate sense of the tradition to which she belongs as well as those that may confront her. In this regard the story of a life is always embedded in the story of the communities from which a personal identity is derived (MacIntyre, 1981).

It is also appropriate in regard to communities of action to invoke Schelling's ideas (Esposito, 1977; Gare, in press-a; Schelling, 1800/1978) which we saw very early in this thesis can assist us with the dynamics of activity and its counterpart, passivity. For Schelling the difference we should attend to is not that of 'organic' and its counterpart 'inorganic', but rather the degree of complexity of structure. He posits

that the more complex the structure, the more difficult it is for the evolved product to achieve a state of indifference. Hence there is irritability in the emergent form, and this form then responds to changes in its environment by seeking to overcome those changes through creativity (as in a creative instinct). 'Activity' is then construed as "a continual prevention of the attainment of indifference" (Esposito, 1977: 92). In order for life to reach beyond itself to achieve wholeness, it must become more productive, but at the more productive levels it also becomes more difficult to satisfy increasingly complex requirements for maintenance, and for the attainment of wholeness and indifference. "Organization occurs whenever a manifold of forces interact to produce an enduring product. In fact individuation and organization are one-and-the-same process. *'In nature,'* Schelling writes, *'what bears the character of individuality must be an organization, and vice versa'*" (Esposito, 1977, p. 100). In this regard Solmarco is an organisation that has a capacity to be a living achievement that acts back on the emergent tradition, but the nature of this reaction at this level of activity (Allen & Starr, 1982) constrains employees to also respond to the narrative-making activity at the level of the State Government. In other words Solmarco is yet to have a coherent response about its future in the ongoing argument at the level of the field.

Solmarco is a new organisation according to the State Government. While many employees from the old organisations, Anessa and Isengate, work in this new organisation, there is nevertheless an intervention on the part of the State Government that brings them together. In forming this new organisation there is a State Government account that itself has some conditions that shape its form. In regard to narrative two major sources of prior and simultaneous activity are apparent. One

evolves at the State level, as part of the ongoing argument over what constitutes local government activity and the need for reform of that activity. The other is evolving at a more complex level that has a history at the federal or national level. It can also be construed as international at an even more complex level of development, one that transcends both the organisation of Solmarco and the field of government in Australia.

According to the contributions of Ricoeur and Carr there are always openings for creativity within the narrative making process, and MacIntyre (1981) shows us how this is applied at the level of tradition. For example ambiguity is for MacIntyre (1977) "the possibility of alternative interpretations" (p. 459), and he argues that this is a central feature of human experience. This ambiguity in turn is an example of what is unresolved in a semantic product, to the extent that process or productivity is more basic than the product that is produced. We are reminded of Schelling (1800/1978) and the notion of 'product' in this regard:

Faced, on the one hand, with the impossibility of overcoming the absolute opposition, and with the necessity of doing so on the other, a product will ensue, but in it the opposition cannot be absolutely, but only partially, overcome; outside the opposition that is resolved by this product, there will lie another that is still unresolved, though this too can be overcome in a second product. Hence every product that arises, in virtue of the fact that it gives only a partial resolution of the infinite opposition, will become the condition of a subsequent product, which, since it still only partially removes the opposition, becomes the condition of a third. All these products will be

subordinated one to another, and all of them ultimately to the first, since everything preceding product sustains the opposition which is the condition of the one following (p. 114).

But in this complexity there must be allowance for a product that is more adequate than any of its predecessors, and also for a position that makes a claim to this. In a semantic sense we must allow for interpretations, metaphors or narratives that could be welcomed with wide communal agreement. MacIntyre (1977) demonstrates the importance of this when he shows that the superiority of Galileo's contribution to the development of science is that it "enables the work of all his predecessors to be evaluated by a common set of standards" (p. 460). MacIntyre contends that because of Galileo the history of late medieval science can finally be cast into a coherent narrative. In other words in regard to the scientific tradition the narrative of science is rewritten in such a way that previous narratives which shaped the tradition can be accounted for. In terms of the presence of a conflict of interpretations an advance is made when an account emerges which adequately brings together in a whole the positions in the dialectic. A field understood in these terms has a tradition of narrative transitions, but before considering this further it is necessary to cover the nature of what could be referred to as 'dominant narratives'. If the vertical forces in a field assert the dominance of a particular narrative position, that dominance, while it might be claimed, is then not necessarily the same as 'wide communal agreement' or what we could also construe as shared meaning achieved in the reaching towards a 'communal truth' or the 'goods' that are pursued at the level of the tradition (MacIntyre, 1981).



In the example of Galileo, the newly configured narrative takes a preferred position in the dialectic. In this sense narratives too have 'belonging'. We can speak of the dominance of a narrative in an ongoing argument, but more importantly we can also speak of those who aspire to have their narrative elevated to a privileged position in a field.

MacIntyre (1981) speaks to some of the ways in which narratives themselves can be said to belong. First he argues that there are narrative genres and we can ask what type of account a particular narrative is; secondly he suggests that one narrative can be said to be embedded in another; and thirdly he contends that we belong to the 'dramas' of others. An extension of the last could include the notion that narratives belong to fields of action as social spaces in the sense described by Bourdieu (1993, 1998b), spaces which in turn have their own tradition.

A tradition, given what has been understood above, can therefore be described as having rival interpretations as well as new narratives which emerge into dominance in social space and time. MacIntyre argues that in this sense we are never in a position to claim that we possess the truth, but rather the most we can claim is that such-and-such a narrative is the best account to date. Added to this he argues that our criteria for judging the best account will also change. Progress therefore consists of the construction and reconstruction of more adequate narratives and forms of narrative (MacIntyre, 1977). For example it is likely that the new CEO of Solmarco will be active in making a narrative about his contribution, and that his narrative will have to account in an adequate way for both what the State Government want, what the ratepayers want and what employees and management want. The challenge of

management at this level could be exactly to do with this capacity to make a coherent narrative, construed as a world in which it would be possible to live, out of disparate lines of narrative making.

From the above we can say that a field has a history of narrative transitions. We can appreciate this in a further example given by E. M. Bruner, who emphasises, in a similar way to Ricoeur, that narratives, once composed, are always open to refiguration. E. M. Bruner (1986) describes how for anthropologists the dominant story about Native American culture changed over a period of some forty years:

In the 1930s and 1940s the dominant story constructed about Native American culture change saw the present as disorganization, the past as glorious, and the future as assimilation. Now, however, we have a new narrative: the present is viewed as a resistance movement, the past as exploitation, and the future as ethnic resurgence (p. 139).

He argues that in the field of anthropology one story gradually became discredited until it was apparent that a new narrative had taken over.

Like other authors covered here, E. M. Bruner argues that it is through narrative that we organise and give meaning to experience, and he highlights how there are always feelings and lived experience not fully encompassed by the dominant story.

Only after a new narrative becomes dominant is there reexamination of the past, rediscovery of old texts, and a recreation of the new heroes of liberation and resistance. The new story articulates what had been only dimly perceived,

authenticates previous feelings, legitimizes new actions, and aligns individual consciousness with a larger social movement (E. M. Bruner, 1986, p. 143).

In this section we have seen some ways in which the process of narrative transformation at the level of social spaces could be understood, and how the lives of new larger narratives can be traced, alongside those which become discredited. By now it will begin to be apparent that an organisation, when defined as 'sub-field', is part of narrative activity that shapes both fields and traditions. It will also be apparent that organisations are influenced by the larger narratives that are actively emergent in a field of action such as that of government. For the employees of Solmarco we could say that there was uncertainty at the time of the merger about the claims being made by the State Government and whether these could be sustained, but again this gives us some sense of the openness of possibility that was there for the former employees of Anessa and Isengate at the time of the merger. Employees lived in the merger as in an event unfolding in time (Carr, 1986), and the few months after the announcement had temporal qualities that were achievements of this unfolding process at the level of lived experience.

## **5.2 The Stakes of Play and 'The Religion of Spring Street'**

Following Bourdieu an organisation is construed in this thesis as a social space that is sub-field, and we could conclude from the above it also exists in time as a narrative-making space that is subject to those forces formative of the field itself. We have seen that Bourdieu argues that a social space is an invisible reality that cannot be shown but which nevertheless organises our actions. Social spaces exist in

relation to what he calls the economy of symbolic transactions, by which he intends in a very broad sense, 'meaning' (Bourdieu, 1991, 1998b). For Bourdieu the agents in a field, where 'agent' is 'person' or 'collective', are engaged in an ongoing struggle of interests. Agents both act and are acted upon, and the very shape of the field and the rules by which the game is played can be in dispute. What is at stake in the argument is a share of what is scarce, and Bourdieu uses the notion of interest to capture this, asking 'What are the stakes of play?'

To participate in the game at the level of a field is to have an interest in the outcome. According to Bourdieu if one is interested then it is not possible to be a disinterested player (Bourdieu, 1998b), hence to be interested in the stakes is to accord a given social game and its particular social stakes a status, that is, that the game is worth pursuing and it does matter (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). To be indifferent is to be unmoved by the game; indifference encompasses both an ethical state of nonpreference as well as the state of not being capable of differentiating the stakes proposed. In a sense there are as many interests as there are fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), but Bourdieu argues that the interests pursued in a field can be conceptualised as different forms of capital. The predominant forms, according to Bourdieu, are constituted into kinds such as economic, social, and cultural capital. Symbolic capital, as another form, is treated somewhat differently as it is deemed to have an overall relationship with the other forms. Linguistic capital is also an important form given the centrality of linguistic competence, which we could understand as incorporating the competence in narrative operations described above.

Money, or that which is equivalent to money such as shares, property, or insurance, is the cornerstone of economic capital. Access to money enables individuals to engage in activities such as inheriting money, investing money and generating profits through the sale of goods and services. These result in the movement of money within the social structures and generate conditions which make it possible to increase the amount of economic capital that can be accessed, hence agents accumulate economic wealth by engaging in economic exchanges. Cultural capital is a form of knowledge, and it enables agents to decipher cultural practices which are grounded in cultural relations or cultural artifacts. It involves empathy towards, appreciation for and competence in cultural phenomena such as the theatre, galleries, and literature, and it extends to include how to behave in a culturally acceptable way. Social capital is the basis for social networks and encompasses friends, relatives, co-workers, political affiliations, as well as professional colleagues. It is "...the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acceptance and recognition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119).

Before considering symbolic capital it is appropriate to note that Bourdieu (1991), like Ricoeur, has a theory of language that he refers to as a model of linguistic production and circulation. He assumes both the existence of a linguistic code with a system of assigned links between sounds and meanings (a cypher) as well as a system of norms regulating linguistic practices, and its counterpart which he argues is an agent who has socially constructed dispositions combined with a certain capacity to

speak. This capacity, he argues, is formed of a linguistic competence which is social along with a capacity to relate to linguistic rules such as grammar. Linguistic competence enables agents to engage in the language processes relevant to a particular field. We shall see this in Ki's story below, especially in the last part offered, when he concludes "And I could see his eyes light up, and I thought, 'good, gotcha'" (Interview with Ki, November 1995, p. 23). In other words we will see in this interview how Ki appreciates, as part of his participation in the emergent field, that at this time of merger his use of words such as 'client' and 'provider' accords him a privilege as one who 'knows' how to use them. He gains the recognition, 'his eyes light up', but also shows how he has symbolic capital in this regard.

Bourdieu (1998b) argues that symbolic capital is "any property (any form of capital whether physical, economic, cultural or social) when it is perceived by social agents endowed with categories of perception which cause them to know it and recognize it, to give it value" (p. 47). This is exemplified, he argues, in the concept of honour as it exists in Mediterranean societies. Honour exists only through repute; that is, it exists because of the representation that others have of it to the extent that they share a set of beliefs liable to cause them to perceive and appreciate certain patterns of conduct as honourable or dishonourable.

More precisely, symbolic capital is the form taken by any species of capital whenever it is perceived through categories of perception that are the product of the embodiment of divisions or of oppositions inscribed in the structure of the distribution of this species of capital (strong/weak, large/small, rich/poor, cultured/uncultured). It follows that the state, which possesses the means of

imposition and inculcation of the durable principles of vision and division that conform to its own structure, is the site par excellence of the concentration and exercise of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 47).

Swartz (1997) adds: "Symbolic capital is a form of power that is not perceived as power but as legitimate demands for recognition, deference, or the services of others" (p. 43). According to Bourdieu when one gains the capital of recognition this permits one to exert symbolic effects in terms of practice. We saw above that practice for Bourdieu (1998b) is a market of symbolic exchanges, and that in effect what are traded in this market are symbolic goods. In this realm of symbolic production the instruments of knowledge are structuring powers because they themselves are structured (Bourdieu, 1991). The symbolic power that results is the power of constructing reality. For Bourdieu (1998b) what is real is relationship; he argues that the fundamental property of a social space "is the reciprocal externality of the objects it encloses" (p. 3). Just as the text has a semi-autonomous existence so too it is important to emphasise that these symbolic goods, while not material in nature, are socially real according to Bourdieu (1998b); for example the debate over material versus spiritual goods is a real and ongoing debate, one which has influences or effects in people's lives. Equally the debate over what constitutes a public service is a real influence on people's lives. We saw in Part 3 how the changes in the public service are described in an official publication of the Commonwealth Government.

Over the last two decades, the Australian Public Service has undergone substantial change, both in its internal management processes and in its methods of service delivery .... Public resources are harnessed by the public

sector to give practical effect to government policies. Traditionally, this process has been known as public administration. Increasingly, it is known as public management, reflecting the growing expectation that public sector managers will take responsibility for achieving results, as well as the increasing emphasis on efficiency (Australia. Commonwealth Government, 2001, p. 59).

According to Bourdieu the economy of symbolic exchanges has certain properties, which it is appropriate to consider in relation to the position of the government as seen in this quote. Firstly he argues that practices always have double truths; they are in a sense ambiguous. The example he gives is the action of gift giving, where there is a logic to giving as well as to the reciprocal action that giving calls forth. This action involves self-deception regarding the obligation of the receiver, for example there may be accepted ways in which the time between the giving of a gift and the response to that gift is handled; a too rapid response may reflect badly on the respondent. Bourdieu (1998b) argues that this process of gift giving will be influenced by collective deception; a whole group of people will collectively misrecognise that the gift requires of the receiver some kind of reciprocal response, but, somewhat contrarily, this may not be openly recognised within the group. Secondly there are taboos about making things explicit; certain truths remain tacit and unsaid, otherwise they risk being destroyed – "Silence about the truth of the exchange is a shared silence" (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 97). Bourdieu (1998b) argues that symbolic acts always assume acts of knowledge and recognition, and that these are cognitive acts on the part of their recipients – "there must be a market for like



symbolic actions, there must be rewards, symbolic profits" (p. 101). Thirdly symbolic capital is produced and accumulated, and this is relational in the sense that its presence assumes the existence of social agents who recognise what is required of them.

We have seen so far that for Bourdieu discourse is the realisation of language in the practical field, and that this field is a market of exchanges within the economy of symbolic exchanges. We saw that a field, such as that of politics, is a site of practical struggles over what is of interest in the field, what I have also considered previously as a dialectic which has a tradition. In these terms a field exists as an ongoing argument over the distribution and different kinds of capital or wealth, and these forms of capital include those described above.

For Bourdieu the notion of symbolic capital, which is an overarching and powerful form of the other kinds, is a rich concept that can be understood as having to do with meaning, in line with the notion of an economy of symbolic transactions. In other words within social spaces some meanings attain a privileged position, along with the persons who represent those meanings. According to Bourdieu when one gains the capital of recognition this permits one to exert symbolic effects in terms of the practices in a field, where practices can be understood as strings of actions over a period of time. This capital would be available to those who could appreciate the direction in which the Australian public service has moved. At the level of 'the organisation' the State Government has the symbolic capital to make local government accountable. At the level of 'person' an employee would have to be able

to respond with self-organising activity as these changes were happening, as well as retrospectively when clear statements like the one above are made.

Solmarco is a local government organisation that we have seen was created within the field of government in Australia. In the first instance this can be traced to activity at the level of the State Government. "It might be of interest to the house to realise that the first commission to look into local government reform in this state was the Sturt commission, established in 1863" (Victoria. Parliament. House of Assembly, 1994, October 19, p. 2). Further inquiries were undertaken in 1962, 1972, and in 1979. In 1985 a Labor government again investigated and vowed to undertake reform, but in 1994 the Liberal/National coalition was claiming that its own program had succeeded where none had done so before (Victoria. Parliament. House of Assembly, 1994, October 19).

The narrative authored at this level tells how reform in local government for the eastern region was needed on economic grounds and this reform will ensure good outcomes measured as better services and lower rates; that local government needs to become more business-like (efficient, accountable, flexible) and less traditional; that political amalgamation is one strategy that is central to these reforms, alongside the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering; that new CEOs are required to be appointed along with new senior staff; that Commissioners will replace elected representatives in the short term; that job losses are likely as part of the rationalisation of services; and that there will be more efficient and economical administration. In part this narrative also tells us about how this is to be achieved – that is the reforms are legislated, and therefore legal sanctions are present to force

local government organisations into compliance with the wishes of the State Government. To the extent that no alternative is given, it is through this narratively argued position, which includes the legislation, that control over local government is to be maintained.

The narrative given by the State Government for local government reforms is a version of what Pusey (1991) refers to as 'economic rationalism'. In Australia, Pusey (1991) makes this connection when he argues:

In every country from the late 1970s programs of state and public sector reform have been driven by a conservative agenda. Although the vigour and scope of the changes have varied from one nation to another, in every case they followed conservative liberal maxims about the "crisis" of "ungovernable democracies" and of "overloaded" states, and always aimed at moving some of the coordination functions of states and bureaucracies to economies and markets. The justifications are universal and the political rhetoric that has been used to drive the reforms is familiar – "eliminating waste and inefficiency, and feather bedding", "saving the taxpayer's dollar", "streamlining" the public sector, to make it "lean and strong", and so on (p. 3).

About the federal public servants he concludes "Along with elected politicians and some types of intellectuals, top public servants are the 'switchmen' of history; when they change their minds the destiny of a nation takes a different course" (Pusey, 1991, p. 2). This suggests they had both the power to conserve their own position, while at the same time bringing in a different narrative about how things were to be done. We could consider that they were privileged through authorship.

Whereas Pusey refers to this as 'political rhetoric', it is my contention that this rhetoric has formation. It is a position in the field of politics, with a history that can be traced in the field of government in Australia. The activity it contributes to is construed here as an ongoing argument, one in which narrative is used as the main form of discourse. Hence positions in the field are narratively argued, and furthermore this activity of narration can be understood in terms of the question 'Who?' (Ricoeur, 1992). Pusey's work suggests that the public servants at the federal level were key players in the field. Their influence was present in the field some ten years before the local government amalgamations in Victoria.

In the 1980s, at the level of the Commonwealth Government, Pusey (1991) argues that the majority of public servants in Canberra, the seat of Commonwealth Government departments, politicians, and the National Capital, had the power to impose one view on successive governments of both conservative and socialist persuasions (Liberal and Labor parties in a predominantly two party political field at the national level). These public servants advocated reforms that were intended to influence the lifestyles of Australians in a way that Pusey (1991) argues was distant from what those public servants themselves had experienced; as he puts it: "A grossly disproportionate number of young men from Australia's top expensive private schools are concentrated in some very specific locations - most notably Treasury" (p. 4). He contends:

The whole cast of policy is grounded in social structure and in the more pervasive and enduring formative influences of socio-economic background, family, and schooling and so in experience that was had some 20, 30 or 40

years earlier. Work in higher administration is so intense that one might have expected it to drown the effects of earlier experience. It is quite remarkable to find that it does not - early experience outweighs several other factors such as age, seniority, and type of work experience which most people would expect (as it turns out, wrongly) to have a direct and unmediated affect on what public policy makers and managers say and do. Beneath the mantle of other factors the indications are that social origins are important and that, in Canberra at least ... those who come from the most privileged social backgrounds are likely to have the most "anti-social" policy attitudes (Pusey, 1991, p. 4).

The foregoing suggests that these public servants had extensive capital that enabled them to influence the shape of the field of government in Australia.

Given the above, there is an international position for 'economic rationalism' as an ideology. In narrative theory it is part of a tradition of readings that Bourdieu (1998a) and others (Gonzalez Casanova, 1996; Martinez & Garcia, 1996) refer to as 'neoliberalism'. In other words the extent to which there is a 'who' in the position of authorship in the field of government can be discussed at the level of the ongoing argument construed as tradition. In Ki's interview there is reference to this as 'the religion of Spring Street'.

Ki – I said [to the employees of Halbron] now that's the argument for the client-provider split, now here's ... a whole lot of background reading to say why a client-provider split is a lousy system – or what the problems are with it. And we're talking about the market – we're going to the market to test if it's

appropriate because we were [so called] "that lousy before" and we'd done all these things with it. And here's a reading list if you want to see what the holes in the market are and where the market doesn't work and why it doesn't work – or why it doesn't always work and so I've taken a very pragmatic approach. I've said you can go and listen to all the religion that comes out of Spring Street (location of State Government) and there's some truth in some of it. And ask the reason why it's coming out and what went wrong before and why is that all coming out. But don't believe the bloody religion – because here's the other side of it and having heard of all of that then make up your own mind as to which is the most pragmatic way to operate (Interview with Ki, November 1995, p. 14).

This captures, in a symbolic way, the 'economic rationalist' position (Pusey, 1991) which we saw above is part of the tradition of readings that informs the narrative activity which the State Government is engaged in.

The Liberal/National Party Coalition, who had the electoral mandate to legislate the changes in local government, positions itself as being conservative. One version of local government reform was imposed, and this activity is also apparent at the level of the organisation. The new CEO appointed to Solmarco had an employment history as a federal public servant and later as a state public servant.

Neoliberalism is described as a set of economic policies that has links to liberalism. The latter advocated the abolition of government intervention in economic matters, by which was intended no restrictions on manufacturing, no barriers on

commerce, and no tariffs (hence free trade). Such ideas were liberal in the sense that there were to be no controls. Earlier, following the Great Depression of the 1930s, intervention by governments and central banks was promoted in order to increase employment, and the belief that governments should advance the common good became more widely accepted. Martinez and Garcia (1996) argue "But the capitalist crisis over the last 25 years, with its shrinking profit rates, inspired the corporate elite to revive economic liberalism. That's what makes it 'neo' or new. Now, with the rapid globalization of the capitalist economy, we are seeing neo-liberalism on a global scale". This movement to free up markets was simultaneous with the kinds of changes introduced in the public service in Australia (Australia. Commonwealth Government, 2001).

At Solmarco the new CEO (Tem) has the capital of recognition of which Bourdieu speaks; he is both a powerful author at the level of organisation and a privileged character in the larger narratives, by virtue of having been selected for membership through a process influenced by those with powers of authorship at the level of State Government.

Bonna – Can you just give me to start with a little bit of brief personal history of your background?

Tem – Why do you need that?

Bonna – Well, I must admit I've asked everybody ... to put me in the picture of where the individuals are as well as –

Tem – Okay. Well, I'm a manager. I came from [education] ... as a CEO – prior to that I was at [a university] as a Deputy Director and for the prior fifteen years I was working in the Commonwealth Government as a senior public servant (Interview with Tem, May 1995, p. 1) (Note that 'commonwealth' can be read as meaning 'federal', as in 'federal public servant' (Pusey, 1991)).

From this exchange it can be argued that the new CEO is well disposed to bring in the narrative achieved at the level of the field, for he is likely to have an appropriate 'habitus' to be appointed into a senior management position at the time of the merger. Habitus is defined by Bourdieu as a system of lasting and transposable dispositions that integrates past experiences and functions as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions, that makes possible the engagement in infinitely diversified activities (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). According to Bourdieu agents are positioned in social space in relation to a multi-dimensional system of coordinates. Firstly there is the global volume of capital possessed, secondly the composition of this capital, and thirdly these two dimensions become the basis for another dimension, which is the evolution in time of a trajectory through social space. This trajectory has a product at any one point in time which is a confluence of the first two dimensions, and it is habitus which Bourdieu (1991) uses to speak of these relationships. Because agents who occupy neighbouring positions in social space are placed in similar conditions and are therefore subject to similar conditioning factors, they have every chance of having similar dispositions and interests, and thus of producing practices and representations of a similar kind. "Those who occupy the



same positions have every chance of having the same habitus, at least insofar as the trajectories which have brought them to these positions are themselves similar" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 5). Thought of in terms of space it is appropriate to say that one has a sense of one's place as well as a sense of the place of others (Bourdieu, 1991). Following on we could say that the new CEO of Solmarco is engaged in narrative activity that is consistent with the habitus of 'public servant' at the level of 'field of government'.

Bonna – So what is your perspective on the two old councils?

Tem – Well. It clearly was possible to get reform under the old regime with a very good administrator and with the support of Council. – But there were other places where it just didn't happen ... and there's no question that Anessa was a place where it didn't happen, where traditionally government had gone on the same and administration had gone on the same for many years.

Bonna – So there were people who had been in positions who had been there for a long time?

Tem – Yes and not just that – not just the length of time obviously – good people can be in a place for a long time, but the work practices were bad – there was no sense of where Australia is now heading and what is now necessary. In one city vis-a-vis another. I mean there were some very good things that were happening in Anessa and there were some good things that were happening in Isengate and obviously there were pockets in the organisation where staff were working very effectively. But there wasn't the

kind of change that's necessary to take Australia into the next century and be productive and competitive.

Bonna – When you say Australia into the next century – what do you mean by that?

Tem – I mean by Australia being competitive.

Bonna – Competitive on the world markets –

Tem – Well yes – maintaining the standards of living – which we're not doing and we cannot afford to do – we couldn't afford to do with our work practices of the past. We are now in Asia and if we want to perform economically we just have to be competitive. One might not like the word 'competitive' but that's what we have to be. We have to be able to win contracts, for our exports to be marketable and competitive and they currently aren't.

Bonna – So the sort of work practices you would mean for example would be staffing work practices.

Tem – Mm, coming to work at nine o'clock, going at half past four, having a day off every fortnight, having half an hour for morning tea, having half an hour for afternoon tea, which was the culture of one organisation, whereas in the other organisation people came to work and did the work and didn't go until it was done. And that's what we're on about at the moment.

Bonna – So that's a massive change?

Tem – It is (Interview with Tem, May, 1995, p. 10).

This contribution not only emphasises the shift away from the kind of organisation which was seen to be 'too traditional' (understood as a temporal intervention to prevent an obligation to tradition), it also shows how the new CEO of Solmarco has the capital of recognition of which Bourdieu speaks. Tem is both a powerful author at the level of organisation and a privileged character in the larger narratives, by virtue of having being selected for membership through the influence of State Government.

But the theory of reading suggests that an authorial strategy that attempts to impose one narrative will generate its own counterpart rhetorically in a community or tradition of readings. During the merger there were several possible communal positions that could be engaged in reauthorship. These positions included senior management, unions and social spaces such as professional associations and other government departments. Included as well are the organisations of Anessa and Isengate; we saw above how the former was mourned and symbolically closed as a contributor in the argument, whereas the latter was actively involved in trying to influence the argument over the future.

While the ongoing argument at the level of field is about how best to govern the country and provide public services, at the level of organisation the argument is over how best to govern at the local level. Any opposition to economic rationalism can be construed as an instance of the rhetorical response that a reader makes to the author of a text and to the text itself, given that texts can be construed as having an existence which is semi-autonomous from the conditions of their production. Readers participate in what Ricoeur (1991a) calls the sedimented expectations of the general

reading public and it is in relationship that they are constituted as competent readers; in other words readers and authors and texts belong to a chain or tradition of readings. We saw this described above in relation to tradition; texts have relations to other texts and belong to a tradition of readings. For Ricoeur it is at this level that the first reply to the rhetoric of persuasion is encountered, so it is important to understand how the structure of the text contributes to the reading experience. For example the narrative of economic rationalism has a life that comes to achievement as a text in the form of the State Government reports on amalgamations; the State Government is the author in respect of these. But equally we could say that the new CEO of Solmarco re-authors this, albeit slightly, into his own version, and then his actions are quasi-texts, and as such are available for reading by employees, ratepayers and, in turn, the State Government.

So far the position being argued for local government reform by the State Government is construed as a version of 'economic rationalism', and it is argued that this has a history as a narrative in a tradition of readings known as 'neoliberalism'. It is argued that the State Government had the symbolic capital which enabled a powerful position of authorship on their part, and that they sought to ensure the continued life of this narrative by appointing a new CEO to Solmarco who was in favour of the evolution of this story. But it is also appropriate to say that such a narrative position could be 'read' in regard to the constraints it could put onto employees. We have seen for example that one narrative is given, not several, and that Solmarco is to be formed accordingly. We can also appreciate that the State

Government has imposed this, rather than engage employees in the narrative making process itself at the level of field.

### **5.3 Conservation as a Strategy of the State Government**

'Conservative' in this thesis could be construed as a position that is arrived at but which is regarded by its authors as ongoing (or conserved) with regard to meaning and positions in social space. The activity of the State Government ensures that there are constraints placed on employees and organisations in regard to their capacity to 'act back' in regard to the social space. So far, we have seen this in operation as certain authorial strategies that seek to limit the process of making shared meaning, and the positions that could be taken in social space to engage in reauthorship. It is also appropriate to consider how there are authorial strategies that seek to conserve the future. We have already seen for example that Tem has a position of privilege that could ensure ongoing authorship in the direction that the State Government posits.

We are reminded that Ricoeur (1984, 1985, 1988) places emphasis on the reader and the rhetorical strategies brought to the action of reading, but legislation that brought reforms to local government would not be easily reauthored. Once legislation is enacted it is intended to be in position for a duration, usually extending to years. Changes in the short term were unlikely given that the Liberal/National Coalition enjoyed wide electoral support. They had been elected and re-elected for the duration of 1992 to 1999. Being confident in their authorship and its influence, they asserted an electoral invincibility that was not to change until the State elections

of 1999 when there was a sudden reversal of their fortunes in the face of growing electoral dissatisfaction. The opposition Labor Party was then voted into government at the State level.

Legislation is a kind of text in narrative form. It belongs to a genre wherein the scope of the reader, as agent, to 'act back' and participate in reauthorship is limited. This can be partially understood through the notion of 'authorial strategy' (Ricoeur, 1984). The notion of 'force' or power is then the capacity to 'effect closure', not only as it relates to narrative activity, but also as it relates to position and whether one has the position within the field from which authorship is legitimised.

An aspect of this closure activity, is the capacity to narrate the future and whether this future is determined. The narrative of economic rationalism presents itself as the only response to secure a meaningful and predictable future. It becomes, by its own reckoning, the only path forward and therefore a reality that must be embraced. Bourdieu (1998a) gives us a sense of this closure of meaning and time when he argues:

Is the economic world really, as the dominant discourse would have us believe, a pure and perfect order, implacably unfolding the logic of its predictable consequences and promptly repressing all deviations from its rules through the sanctions it inflicts, either automatically or, more exceptionally, through its armed agent, the IMF [International Monetary Fund] or the OECD [Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development] and the drastic policies they impose – reduced labour costs, cuts in public spending and a more 'flexible' labour market? What if

it were, in reality, only the implementation of a utopia, neo-liberalism, thus converted into a *political programme*, but a utopia which, with the aid of the economic theory to which it subscribes, manages to see itself as the scientific description of reality? (p. 94).

Furthermore this international political movement of neoliberalism, conservative through its authorship strategies, proceeds simultaneously with the emergence of the management theory that Reed (1996) describes as rationalist in persuasion. According to Reed rationalism has been profoundly influential, both historically and conceptually, on the debate over the best approach to do organisational analysis. He argues that rationalism:

...ideologically resonated with the development of political institutions and economic structures during the early and mid twentieth century, rendering the corporation and political state "knowable". It provided a representation of emerging organizational forms that legitimated their increasing power and influence as inevitable features of a long-term historical trajectory through discourses of rational technocratic administration and management (Ellul 1964; Gouldner 1976). It also "lifted" the theory and practice of organizational management from an intuitive craft into a codified and analyzable body of knowledge that traded on the immensely powerful cultural capital and symbolism of science (Reed, 1996, p. 36).

Rationalism is identified with the evolution of the rational/integration/market position of the ongoing argument which is constitutive of management studies (Reed, 1996); as we saw above, the opposing argument is construed as narrative positions in

the counter-tradition of what Reed (1996) nominates as the power/knowledge/justice pole. For Bourdieu (1998a) the attempt to implement neoliberalism is aided by invoking an economic theory that sees itself as meaningful because it equates itself with the scientific description of reality. He argues that this is a:

...mathematical fiction, based, from the outset, on a gigantic abstraction, which, contrary to what economists who defend their right to inevitable abstractions like to think, cannot be reduced to the effect – constitutive of every scientific project – of object construction as a deliberately selective apprehension of the real. This abstraction, performed in the name of a strict and narrow view of rationality, identified with individual rationality, consists in bracketing off the economic and social conditions of rational dispositions (and in particular those of the calculating disposition applied to economic matters which is the basis of the neo-liberal view) and of the economic and social structures which are the condition of their exercise, or, more precisely, of the production and reproduction of those dispositions and those structures (p. 94).

Understanding the presence of this narrative position of 'economic rationalism' at the level of an organisation, we would have to conclude that the narrative of local government reform is linked through the action of reauthorship to this larger narrative, and how this is positioned in the argument such that it could become dominant in the sense described by E. Bruner (1986) above. In the months following the announcement the lived experience of the merger at the level of the organisation can be understood as a period when certain meanings were devalued and



positioned as being part of a 'dead tradition', and this was accompanied by attempts to bring in the meaning consistent with the narrative of economic rationalism. But what is also present at this level of text is an attempt to close time such that one future is protended.

With regard to temporality as a quality of the becoming-text that is Solmarco, it is appropriate to consider how a text has a part-whole relation internal to it, and the world it proposes is "defined as the intentional correlate of a sequence of sentences [which remains] to be made into a whole for such a world to be intended" (Ricoeur, 1991a, p. 400). In a sequence of temporality each sentence points beyond itself by opening a perspective. It is this anticipation of the sentence that Ricoeur likens to the Husserlian play of protentions and retentions. This play "functions in the text only if it is taken in hand by readers who welcome it into the play of their own expectations" (Ricoeur, 1991a, p. 400). Therefore Ricoeur (1991a) argues that a text is a work to the extent that it is experienced by the reader as a whole. This is important because when we read we travel inside the work as our reading progresses and our expectations of the reading project are modified over the duration of the action of reading. A work is therefore the product or achievement of the interaction of the text and the reader. This extends the analogy of 'world' from the limited coupling of 'the world of the text' to 'the world of the reader'; it brings into consideration 'the proposed world'. This is 'the world in front of the text' – that is, what the interactive work of reading points to as an achievement that the reader makes. This hermeneutic parallels the narrative operations we saw above. The text is the paradigm Ricoeur (1984) uses to explore the mode in which transformation of worlds occurs. There is a continual

interplay, and as this happens the text has relations internal to it that come into the play; the text constitutes itself sentence by sentence and itself undergoes transformation. In this manner 'economic rationalism' has a life, and invites a temporal engagement as well as an engagement of the imagination. An employee has to imagine the world in which it could be possible to dwell, that is the world evoked by 'economic rationalism', as well as live inside the process whereby the management of Solmarco reauthors the text itself into a new version.

In his seminal work Time & narrative, Ricoeur considers how "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience" (1984, p. 3). He contends that the common feature of human experience, that which we mark, organise and clarify by the activity of narration, is its temporal character (Ricoeur, 1991d). We can appreciate that this dynamic forms part of the conditions of the formation of narrative identities, not only of persons but of organisations as well.

Ricoeur argues "just when the text seems to close itself up upon the reader in a terrorist act, by splitting its receivers in two it reopens a play space that rereading can turn into a space of freedom" (Ricoeur, 1991a, p. 397); this is the 'reflexivity of reading'. But there are also readers who are "terrorized by the decree of predestination striking their reading" (Ricoeur, 1991a, p. 398). We can see this below in Rom's story. Over a short period of half a year Rom comes to understand how his position is quite altered; the world he sees ahead continues the constraints whereby public service activity is defined in economic terms, but his own desire to be a public

servant on his terms is seen to be thwarted. We shall see how his presentation of himself as an unfinished autobiography, wherein there could have been high hopes for the future, is reduced. For Rom this leads to his own kind of closure as the only power left to him is to put constraints on his contribution to Solmarco. The future is closed to one kind of narrative and characters with the qualities that suit this narrative and the life of it as a text.

Morson (1994) considers these authorial strategies that relate to the experience of time, and how our experience of the temporal conditions in a text can influence the ways in which we are invited to engage with the text. 'Foreshadowing' is a strategy that is a good example of the open/closed dynamic that is at work in narrative operations (Morson, 1994). In literary terms this strategy points to a future that is already determined and in a sense inscribed in the 'present' through reading. A specific later event is already given at the time of an earlier event, and it is also possible to say that the author of the text sets out at the beginning with a firm idea about how the ending will appear. Morson argues

Thus the sense of many possible futures, which we experience at every present moment, is revealed as an illusion. What will be must be; events are heading in a single direction; time is entirely linear or, as the underground man says, "logarithmic," because the future is either known for certain or calculable (at least in principle) with mathematical certainty (1994, p. 117).

According to Morson wisdom in such a world consists in the appreciation of inevitability. He argues that there is an oracular sense to this kind of temporality.

As readers or viewers of a story with foreshadowing we recognize a character's struggle for alternatives as doomed or deluded. If the real world is governed by the same kind of temporality, then we would do well never to forget the singularity of the future (Morson, 1994, p. 117).

We shall read in Keep's account that the merger was regarded as inevitable no matter how much people protested, and we shall see how Ki, in his part as the CEO of Isengate, speaks of the importance of getting people as prepared as he could for what was going to be inevitable change.

'Sideshadowing' is a concept that refers to those strategies on the part of authors that enable us to understand how time can be 'open'. Whereas foreshadowing presents the future as one narrative and therefore known, sideshadowing is a strategy of multiple narratives. While there are actual events which happen we can have an appreciation through sideshadowing that other events could just as well have happened. The merger of Isengate and Anessa could have been quite different if more than two organisations were merged as happened with many other local government organisations, or if one of the previous CEOs had been appointed. Even an event that is judged as passed has with it the shadows of what could have happened; these other possibilities are present. "Along with the event, we see its alternatives; with each present, another possible present of might-have-beens or might-bes" (Morson, 1994, p. 118). Sideshadowing helps us to understand in the present reading that the future has open possibilities.

After Ki lost his position as CEO of Isengate we shall see that he obtained another position as a CEO in local government. In this position he was actively using

this technique of sideshadowing. For example he was working in collaboration with employees to try to predict what possible futures the State Government could bring about through further attempts to open local government up to market forces.

Morson's work suggests that those who restore 'presentness' to the present and who recognize the communal process of narrative making could enhance the competition between temporality tending towards closure and temporality tending towards openness. Morson argues that "Sideshadowing restores the field and thereby recreates the *fullness of time* as it was. Sideshadowing suggests that to understand any moment is to grasp its field of possibilities" (1994, p. 119). Instead of closing time by reducing the field of possibilities to a line as happens in the narrative of economic rationalism, there could be narratives that open identity to new possibilities and managers who facilitate or enable this process. Constant sideshadowing also has the advantage that evolving circumstances in the form of larger narrative makings at the level of field, and relations between fields, could be responded to in a positive way. The plurality of possibilities may require attention to enabling constraints, suggesting a more delicate process of management than current management theory allows for (Reed, 1996).

Readers can be part of the process to the extent that they can imagine a world in front of the text to which one could belong. For Ricoeur (1991i) there is the *world* of the text:

A text, actually, is not a self-enclosed entity. It has not only a formal structure, it points beyond itself to a possible world, a world I could inhabit,

where I could actualize my own possibilities in so far as I am in the world (p. 349).

But there are forces that influence this process. In 'economic rationalism' we could say one future is foreshadowed and that some who were active in the argument at the level of 'the organisation' are deliberately excluded. The world of the future is foretold and there is no future for them in it. Anxiety was experienced by those who lost their positions. We shall see for example how Ki speaks of a 'wilderness' period when he was not sure that he would gain another position as a CEO in local government. He wonders how he would gainfully employ his time and he speculates on how he could take up the activity of mid-week sailing. For Rom there was similar speculation on how to apply his skills to be self-employed. But those who were caught up in this narrative of economic rationalism could easily have made a coherent account of how they could end up in the character of 'unemployed'. As if to reinforce this, there are regular reminders in the Australian media of how high the unemployment rate is and what membership in this space could be like.

This kind of temporal closure can also be approached through Carr's ideas about action. An event such as a merger has 'closure' inherent to it and is amenable to the imposition of a narrative structure of 'beginning, middle, end'. The narrative about local government reform divided the future from the past for the organisations concerned in this merger. We saw above how those from Anessa mourned and celebrated the end of an era, and while there was a different immediate response from Isengate, where there was a desire to live on and influence the process, there was

agreement later in the year that both organisations were dead. When asked if Isengate was completely dead, Keep answered:

Keep – Gone, but then again so is the old Anessa. Yes, and I think that needed to happen. I think we needed a Solmarco. But I just don't like the way Solmarco has developed. I think a lot of people feel that we have taken two steps backwards (Interview with Keep, August 1995, p. 79).

In the merger discussed here, not only was a new narrative imposed but also some key narrative makers were removed from the organisation during the months following the merger announcement. At this stage of 'becoming', construed here as 'becoming-text', new narrative makers have entered the space and time of the organisation, and possibly the intention of this is to speed up the process of merger. When considered in relation to the time of an individual life, the 'becoming-text' of the organisation and the 'becoming-text' of a life are both emergent at a time of narrative transition; there is simultaneity of experience. Ricoeur argues that the time of a life is what is salient for the person who is living out a life. "There is the real paradox: on a cosmic scale our life span is insignificant, yet this brief period of time when we appear in the world is the moment during which all meaningful questions arise" (Ricoeur, 1991i, p. 343). A merger is experienced as an intervention in what was hoped for a life in the sense that we have some authorship in our own life. Ricoeur argues that the question 'What is a human?' follows on from a series of prior questions: 'what can I know?', 'what must I do?', and what am I allowed to hope?' (Ricoeur, 1989). The theory of reading suggests that a person brings the experience of a life to the process of deciding whether to stay in an organisation after a merger or

even how enthusiastically the transition is made to a different set of hopes. In this merger it is apparent that the managers are akin to an audience which has suddenly disappeared from the time of a life. The removal of the managers can be understood in this context as an important temporal intervention which pertains to person's lives. The elaboration given in answer to 'Who?', that is 'It's me here', is interrupted in time, and furthermore we can appreciate that the interruption can be to the forward casting grasp of a sense of identity. In other words where identity is understood as an active engagement there is an imagined future that is no longer tenable.

We have seen so far that Solmarco, as an organisation in the field of government in Australia, was positioned in such a way that the dominant narrative in the field could, with ease, be reauthored, and even legislated, into the lowest, or local, level of the field. The power to effect the mergers came from the middle level of government, but the narrative given for the reforms was common to the field as a whole. Local government was brought into a coherent position with the rest of the field according to a transforming force present in field, and in the tradition, construed as the ongoing argument over what constitutes public service activity. According to Gare (in press-b), self-organisation is an activity that is directed towards achieving coherence. At the level of 'the organisation', Solmarco, the narrative activity which is present in the field is brought into the space and time of the organisation; the dominance of the position argued must extend to the whole field. In other words the State Government had the symbolic capital to force the transformation onto local government, construed as the force of a coherent and unquestionable narrative that presented itself not as a narrative, but rather as a reality that could not be avoided.



This is supported by the brevity of the government reports and the lack of justification beyond those related to the economic stance taken. (Ironically it could be argued they did not have the economic capital as such because this was collected at the local level in the form of rates and federal government grants.) State Government politicians and employees had influence over the narrative-making process within the space of the new organisation, but it is appropriate to also consider what forms of opposition could exist at the level of organisation. This is important because an individual agent, that is an employee, does not act in isolation of other agents who are operating in the space; there is the question of membership. For example we shall see in Rom's account how the loss of recognition in the space influenced his capacity to capitalise on 'time and space to tell a story'. This loss is attributed by Rom to the removal of those senior managers who had recognised his past contribution, and could affirm his value as a member of the new organisation, Solmarco. By contrast in Keep's account we shall see that the merger brought a possible future that was previously a distant possibility into consideration 'now'. There was an opening of time and other possibilities became more attractive to that of staying on at Solmarco.

In this section we have seen some of the temporal qualities that could be present in the organisation as a 'becoming-text', and how economic rationalism is a position that could constrain employees in regard to their future contribution. There is one narrative-making space with one narrative that claims dominance, but there is also a protended future with no possibility of sideshadowing according to the State Government.

#### 5.4 Conservation of Membership

For Ricoeur (1991a) the narrative process has its counterpart in a theory of reading, and such a theory incorporates the author's strategy towards the reader, the inscription of this strategy in a text, and the response by the reader as a reading subject and as a reading public. In the process of reading a reader undertakes a reply to an author who has set out with a strategy to persuade that reader. Although there are some ongoing and actively emergent dynamics in the lived experience of a merger, and the notion of 'becoming-text' is more appropriate in this thesis than is the notion of 'text' it is still appropriate to construe text as a part of a whole process; for example the State Government's position on local government reform can be construed as a quasi-text that itself belongs to some larger dynamics as we have already seen in this thesis.

In Time and narrative, Ricoeur (1985) speaks of the notions of 'point of view' and 'narrative voice' which are linked to the strategies or games that authors put into play. An author takes the form of a 'narrative voice' with the purpose of offering the virtual reader or addressee a work (or text or world), and implied in this action are certain strategies whereby the author sets out to influence the reader. Such strategies can be considered as rhetorical strategies, and we have seen above some ways in which these strategies are played in relation to how time is configured. In addition to other authorial strategies Ricoeur describes the author's right to configure the world as if that author is inside the minds of others, for example characters. An author persuades the reader to apprehend the work offered as a unified totality, and a reader

in turn apprehends the work as a work 'by somebody', hence the choices that the author has made, and the context of those decisions, become part of reading.

An example of an authorial strategy is the way that the State Government dismissed both elected councillors and the most senior administrators or public servants (who are referred to here as 'CEOs'). This opened the way for 'characters' who would bring with them a desire to continue the life of the narrative the State Government was creating about local government reform. From the position of the author, these new characters could be selected on the basis of their agreement with the author.

Ricoeur (1991a) also includes at this level the related notion of reliable versus unreliable narrator. There is a pact of reading in the sense that trust acts as a counterbalance to the violence that can be concealed in the strategy of persuasion. The author asks of the reader the right which encompasses that of judgement, for example an author presents a character in the novel in a certain light, with characteristics not only chosen by the author but also evaluated by the author who is in the powerful position of sitting in judgement.

Senior managers by and large lost their positions in the merger of Anessa and Isengate. The CEO of Anessa was forced into retirement, and the CEO of Isengate was transferred to another newly amalgamated organisation in the field on a temporary basis. At the level of sub-field which is local government this strategy was employed by the State Government for the amalgamations that were undertaken in this particular round. In other words all of the CEOs in the region were either dismissed or moved into caretaker positions to cover the gaps caused by the

dismissals across the region. In addition the elected representatives were dismissed and 'Commissioners' appointed to administer councils. Hence Solmarco was headed up for an interim of some months by an acting CEO who reported to the three Commissioners. As we shall see in the account of Ki in Part 6, the State Government, through the Minister for Local Government and the Office of Local Government, was influential in choosing both interim CEOs and Commissioners.

Senior staff, those below CEO level but in top management positions, did not lose their jobs immediately but were part of the interim phase under the acting CEO. Once the new CEO of Solmarco (Tem) was in position, a program was begun to advertise the positions at each level, beginning at the second level and working down during the succeeding months. At level four only internal advertisements were generated for positions, but for the top three levels the field was open to applicants from outside the organisation of Solmarco. We shall gain a sense of this in Rom's account below.

From the above we could conclude that any internal opposition from senior management was unlikely. Only one former manager at level 2 appeared to gain one of the twelve new senior positions (Interview with Rom, September, 1995, p. 4), hence those who had lost a position had also lost any recognised authorship within the narrative-making space at the level of organisation.

Another potential source of opposition can be seen in Rom's comments (Interview with Rom, January 1995) about the unions at Isengate and how they had only recently finished negotiating an enterprise bargain agreement under industrial relations reforms that had been instituted at the federal level. This was part of

legislative activity by the Commonwealth Government which sought to constrain or render passive the collective activity of unions at the level of the employer-employee relationship.

A Joint Shop Committee was set up to bring together the union representatives from Anessa and Isengate. There were four unions which dealt with the local government organisations. Although 'unwieldy' because of a large membership, according to Rom the committee did have some success at the level of the new organisation. (Note that 'shop steward' is used to refer to those elected within the unions to represent the interests of workers).

Rom – People were meeting all over the place – so we agreed that we would form a delegation from the people and go and meet ... the Acting Chief Executive and voice our concerns, which we did. And they backed off considerably since then. "Soon as possible" has been changed to "Soon as practical", which is a totally different emphasis. An undertaking was made that nothing would change until the 9th of January. People were really concerned. They'd go away on Christmas leave and come back either to no job at all or to their desk and everything was gone and they'd discover they no longer work at Isengate or Anessa or vice-versa. That was a real concern ...

Bonna – So ... you feel as a Shop Steward that you're actually as a [union] group having some influence on that.

Rom – Yes, yes I felt that our meeting with [the Acting CEO] was probably a catalyst, that it probably made things a lot better. He came across as a guy

who would not brook any dissension whatsoever, like Jeff Kennett does [the Premier in the State Government of Victoria, and a major player in the conservative Liberal Party]. But once we had spoken to him as to what our concerns were – I wouldn't say he backed off – but he was quite willing to listen to ideas. I mean the start of the meeting was quite aggressive, and we started off saying well we're concerned about timelines that are being put in place and the response was "What timelines?". Now a response like that [is] you know – playing dumb – we weren't too pleased about that ... they had pencilled in dates and said well this will happen on this date and this will happen on this date. But all they had said was that they wanted to move things as soon as possible ... anyway he said then, in response to several questions, that he had used someone's department ... as an example of someone who could be moved fairly easily, and very quickly discovered that it couldn't be moved very easily. And so people were saying oh yeah well we'll move the two finance departments together and they could do that next week. But they couldn't, and when it was clear that there actually were reasons A through to B – they couldn't be – he would back off from that and say "it can't be done, we've got to resolve these other problems first". But I think that the Shop Steward meeting helped that recognition a lot earlier. And also made him realise that the staff care (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 13-15).

Keep similarly speaks of the unions as having some influence. The G17 was the union/employer agreement that had been negotiated about the mergers in local

government. (Note in this story part the 'we' is the Human Resources department of Solmarco).

Bonna – Do you have faith that the G17 will be applied? How do you feel about that?

Keep – Yes I do. Simply because – although we aren't a strong unionised workforce, the union does have quite a strong presence ... whenever the unions see something they're not happy with, then they do step right in and we have quite a lot of negotiations with them. And I think they'll be having their eyes watching all of the local government at the moment, make sure they do stand by all these agreements they've signed. And I don't think that they would let us get away with too much. And I don't think it would be worth our while either. You know I mean if you go and sign an agreement like that you can't bend the rules because you lose faith – your employees' faith (Interview with Keep, January 1995, p. 11).

There were other possible sources of collective action; for example Red spoke of the demands of other federal government departments in the area of aged care and health. Because most of the grants used by local government to provide these services are actually funded from Commonwealth Government sources, the appropriate departments tend to attach their own conditions to how the money will be spent (Interview with Red, October, 1995). (Note: Red had worked at Anessa for seven years in various positions providing community services). Several informants also referred to the differences between indoor and outdoor staff on some issues. Rom spoke of how the outdoor staff seemed to be keen on receiving a redundancy payout

and leaving the organisation because of the merger, and Keep spoke of the problems in communicating what was happening to the outdoor staff. For example letters sent out by the Isengate CEO could not always be read and understood, because some outdoor staff lacked the literacy levels needed to make basic interpretations about their place in what was happening.

Keep – People would come and say well what else do you know and it's like well nobody knows anything – this is as much as we know. I mean that was a bit disheartening for everybody, but I think it was disheartening for Ki ... I don't think anybody had any idea what was going to happen, and I think with the limitations that were there they did a really good job ... we had a few funny examples ... one gentleman came in and he was actually going through a redundancy at the time, going in the next few weeks, and Ki had sent out a letter saying that we're all sick and tired of the amalgamation process and you know 'be glad when it is over'. This gentleman came in and said "what does this letter say? it says I've had too much sick leave and I'm not gonna get my redundancy package". Now he was obviously not able to read very well and had just picked out the bits that he thought were relevant to him. It was very clear to us you know that sometimes you have to be really careful about what you say to certain members of the staff. It is difficult to reach everybody (Interview with Keep, January, 1995, p. 6).

We could conclude from the above that the State Government makes an account that positions local government in the field of government as a whole, and that some characters in the narrative of local government reform are authorised to act



in the space of organisation and some are not. As part of this the sources of existing opposition in the narrative-making space of the organisation seem to be denied any powers of authorship. They are not recognised as forms of opposition that could be powerful in a reauthorship sense. While MacIntyre (1981) argues that human beings can be held to account for that which they author, it is apparent that part of the State Government narrative was the attempt, through dominance of authorship, to disempower or render passive any potentially effective opposing force that could make the State Government accountable for its actions. From the position of employees there was no surety that management, unions, and other government departments were favoured agents in the narrative of local government reform. But as part of this we could also consider how strategies of conservation were at work in these dynamics.

In appropriating and valuing the narrative of economic rationalism the State Government positions itself in alliance with market forces. In this narrative a favoured character is business, in the sense that 'business activity' provides the counterposition to 'public service' because the former is seen to be accountable to 'the market' and 'market forces' rather than the electorate. We saw above that 'ratepayers', who are the electorate at the local government level, are construed in the narrative as 'shareholders' (Victoria. Parliament. House of Assembly, 1994, October 19). In the State Government narrative employees are not only portrayed as passive but they also have negative characteristics. For example by not giving ratepayers value for their taxes, employees are portrayed as not being adequately accountable. By having union membership employees are also not portrayed positively by economic rationalism.

The opposition to the Liberal/National Coalition is construed at the state level as being the Labor Party, and the debates constantly give central play by the former to what is regarded as inappropriate support by the latter for union membership (Victoria. Parliament. House of Assembly, 1994, October 19).

Bourdieu (1998a) speaks of the presence of 'accomplices' in this regard. The narrative of neoliberalism gives value to the free movement of capital; in other words all constraint on the movement of capital is regarded as unacceptable. Nations and fields are shaped to be subservient to this narrative, ironically in the name of competition. While sources of possible response were eliminated as a kind of authorial strategy which was deployed by the State Government, there were replacements according to the narrative. Inside local government organisations, through Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), some local government organisations were introducing a 'client-provider split'. We shall see below how Ki, as a new CEO, positions himself in relation to this reform. What this could mean is that some employees would be in the position of 'client' and some would become providers of services to this client, even though all still worked for the same organisation. For example the work of an engineering department could be either tendered out completely to another provider and the engineers dismissed, or it could be split, with some engineers designated to work on the 'client' side and some on the 'provider' side. This could occur even though these employees would be continuing, for the most part, as employees of that engineering department, and members of local government employment conditions. Engineers in the 'provider' position could tender to carry out work for the client, or for that matter other clients, but competing with

them would be providers both in other local government organisations and in private engineering consulting firms. This was part of the emergent activity of CCT; it involved the public tendering out of local government works. In other words the work of some public servants was to be opened up to the competition of the market at large, as part of this move to corporatise the work of public servants. Bourdieu (1998a) contends that it is the purpose of neoliberalism to eliminate sources of opposition and to accord symbolic privilege to market forces, and this can be seen as part of the strategies of conservation of the State Government.

In the following we can see concern on the part of an employee over the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering, in particular the question of 'who' will be undertaking the assessment of tenders when the expertise may only exist within local government organisations.

Bonna – When you say the Assessment team – what's that?

Keep – Well it's going to be independent people ... who make up an assessment team for tenders? .... I don't know where they'll be chosen from but like it might be an ex-employee from a payroll department ...

Bonna – They'll be in-house people but separate from –

Keep – ... our people have just gone through a tendering process and their manager, who was probably the one with the most expertise, couldn't help them with the bid because he was going to be on the tender assessment team.

So if those sort of things happen [and could] continue to happen in the future – I mean I understand how it could end up that way, but I don't think it's ideal

in any way shape or form. The people they needed the most at that time weren't available ... they had to [say] "can't talk to you about it or we will become biased". So it can become very difficult I think.

Bonna – How do you feel about something like that?

Keep – Well I think that's a lot scarier to me than amalgamation is. I mean it's just a very big unknown ... Isengate had a three year plan for services. We were actually in the third year – the feeling being ... if in-house people lose their jobs then HR [Human Resources] is obviously going to need less people and we won't know that until everybody else has done their part of it. So I'm assuming that that will remain the same in the City of Solmarco and that we won't know until the third year what's happening. So I suppose by then we'll have a fairly good idea whether people are winning their bids or losing their bids and what we can do to win ours (Interview with Keep, January, 1995, p. 14).

The State Government is moving to shift the dynamics of membership, in part by bringing about a division that is not characterised by union/management relations, as can be seen operating in the Consultative Committee formed at Isengate of union and management representatives, but rather is characterised by market forces.

But we should also consider the importance of having the right 'habitus' to act successfully at the level of field and sub-field. The new CEO of Solmarco, who was a Commonwealth public servant in the period studied by Pusey (1991), is representative of this as we have seen.

The capacity of employees to make a contribution to the ongoing argument and their place in it, could depend not only on the narrative conditions in which they find themselves, but also on their competence to take a position in the ongoing argument. For Bourdieu (1998b), a group of persons who are mobilized by and through the defense of its own interests, only comes to exist through a 'collective work of construction', and this activity is inseparably theoretical and practical. For example both the practice of being a public servant, and the activity of belonging to the ongoing argument over what this means, together influence any claim to be a public servant.

The symbolic work of *constitution* or consecration that is necessary to create a unified group (imposition of names, acronyms, of rallying signs, public demonstrations, etc.) is all the more likely to succeed if the social agents on which it is exerted are more inclined, because of their proximity in the space of social positions and also because of the dispositions and interests associated with those positions, to mutually recognize each other and recognize themselves in the same project (political or otherwise) (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 32).

What Bourdieu describes as an economy of symbolic exchanges, has inherent to it imprecision and indeterminacy, and his description of this is akin to the ambiguity discussed by the narrative theorists considered above. To be productive, the strategies and practices which agents employ succeed on a collective level only because they are adjusted to the game or struggle which occurs in fields; there are openings at the level of symbolic meaning. Bourdieu (1998b) argues that this

collective work, which we have seen is the work of symbolic construction, is only possible if agents are endowed with categories of perception and appreciation that match those employed in the field. For example in the gift giving transaction considered above, there have to be agents who know about the appropriate way to respond to a gift. Bourdieu (1998b) argues that agents acquire dispositions through incorporation of 'market structures' into 'cognitive structures', and it is in response to elaborating this problematic that he uses the concept of 'habitus'. It is now appropriate to consider the activity of positioning in terms of this key concept.

Habitus is defined by Bourdieu as “a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 18). He argues that individuals are coherent and systematic because they have internalised external structures which have a certain logic and regularity and that this becomes a deep matrix or system that is “historically constituted, institutionally grounded and thus socially variable” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 19). Dispositions are thus based on lived experience, or described another way it is appropriate to say that dispositions are a weaving together of social structures and lived experience.

Habitus arises from the process of taking up an event out of the contingency of the accidental, constituting it as a problem and applying to it the principles of its solution. Bourdieu likens this to the art of inventing. The genesis of habitus cannot be described as either autonomous development of a unique essence or as continuous creation of novelty, rather habitus influences agents by generating 'reasonable' and

'common-sense' behaviours within the limits and regularities of what is possible within the social structures (Bourdieu, 1990).

The theory of action which I propose (with the notion of habitus) amounts to saying that most human actions have as a basis something quite different from intention, that is, acquired dispositions which make it so that an action can and should be interpreted as oriented toward one objective or another without anyone being able to claim that that objective was a conscious design (it is here that the "everything occurs as if" is very important). The best example of such a disposition is without doubt the feel for the game; the player, having deeply internalized the regularities of a game, does what he must do at the moment it is necessary, without needing to ask explicitly what is to be done (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 97).

As described above a field is a social space, and this space, although real in its effects, is likened by Bourdieu to an invisible reality, one that is relational in nature. As with a field, Bourdieu (1998b) also describes habitus as a social space. It is notable that Bourdieu (1998b) argues that one of the functions of the notion of habitus is to account for the unity of style, which unites the practices and goods of a single agent or a class of agents: "[T]he habitus is this generative and unifying principle which retranslates the intrinsic and relational characteristics of a position into a unitary lifestyle, that is, a unitary set of choices of persons, goods and practices" (p. 7). Habitus is the formation of generative principles of distinct and distinctive practices and these are principles of vision and division that become symbolic differences and constitute a veritable language. These ideas could be

applied in this thesis in many ways, for example the ongoing argument over what constitutes a public service could both attract agents who have the appropriate habitus and be constitutive of membership conventions in the field – conventions about who could be potential agents in terms of the activities engaged in. A person with the appropriate habitus could have improved prospects of advancement in management compared to another person.

Bourdieu argues that habitus is both a product of history, and produces history in accordance with the schemes generated by history. As a 'feel for the game' habitus is embodied history; internalised from early childhood it becomes like second nature and is forgotten as history. At every moment in the process new experiences are structured in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences, the latter being modified by new experiences within the limits defined by their power of selection according to the game. This brings about a unique integration, dominated by the earliest experiences of the individual agent, of the experiences common to members of the same class.

There is commonality in schemes of perception, thought and action, but for each individual habitus is constituted and embodied in the course of an individual history. Individuals are unique because of the singularity of their social trajectories. There is also the sense in which habitus, internalised as second nature and therefore forgotten as history, gives practices their relative autonomy from external determinations in the immediate present (Bourdieu, 1990). A person, in a sense, is a world within a world, a person who holds both permanence and change, and dispositions to action, within one history. While the public service could be



dominated by a 'public service' habitus, this dominance may not be total. For example this 'relative autonomy' suggests the kind of openings that could be present for those who seem unlikely candidates for senior management positions. When Ki spoke in Part 3 about his activity of being a 'change agent' he also spoke of the changes that occurred in those subordinated to him; we saw for example the story of a young manager who was described as being 'less intolerant of mediocrity' than he had been prior to various changes that had occurred at Isengate in the six years of Ki's leadership (Interview with Ki, January, 1995).

We have seen here that 'social structure' is integral to the formation and operation of habitus. In other words habitus is incomplete without the 'social structure' that enables the organised improvisation of agents to be put into play. From this we can understand that habitus shapes the action of agents and is shaped in turn by the action taken, hence his claim that an action is not based on intention as understood in some positions, but rather as a disposition to act – that is, as habitus (Bourdieu, 1998b).

Earlier we saw that certain forms of capital are inherent to the operation of a field, that these become the stakes within the field, and that the shape and divisions of the field often constitute the central stake. Changes in the structure of the field are the result of groups and individuals altering the distribution and weighting of the various forms of capital. In turn, individuals and institutions are influenced by a set of objective relations which operate according to the specific logic and regularities of that field.

Just as habitus informs practice from within, a field structures action and representation from without: it offers the individual a gamut of possible stances and moves that she can adopt, each with its associated profits, costs, and subsequent potentialities. Also, position in the field inclines agents toward particular patterns of conduct: those who occupy the dominant position in a field tend to pursue strategies of conservation (of the existing distribution of capital) while those relegated to subordinate locations are more liable to employ strategies of subversion (Wacquant, 1998, p. 222).

Although Bourdieu does not address the question of selfhood as a project in the same manner as Ricoeur, his ideas are relevant because he does have a theory of agency with respect to the fields of practice which were considered above. For Bourdieu action is taken within a social space and it is appropriate to consider a field, which is both a site of forces and a site of struggle, as an important social space within which we make a response to the 'Who?' questions.

According to Bourdieu the best example of such a disposition is 'the feel for the game' which we saw earlier is played out within a field. He argues that the player in a field, having deeply internalised the regularities of a game, does what she must do at the moment it is necessary, without needing to ask explicitly what is to be done (Bourdieu, 1998b). Like the reader in Ricoeur's theory of reading, a player is both enabled to take action and is constrained from taking action. Bourdieu (1998b) also argues evocatively for the importance of understanding agency in context when he says:

The social world embraces me like a point. But this point is a *point of view*, the principle of a view adopted from a point located in social space, a *perspective* which is defined, in its form and contents, by the objective position from which it is adopted. The social space is indeed the first and last reality, since it still commands the representations that the social agents have of it (p. 13).

We can see from the above that the notion of habitus is pertinent to questions about 'Who?'. For example employees who are public servants in local government could misrecognise, as part of habitus, the stability of their own position in the ongoing argument. We shall see in Keep's story below that making a career in the public service is no longer viewed as the stable option it once could have been for young people with a career ahead of them. We may also attend to how Ki has a good feel for the game and this enables him to retain a position of influence at the level of the field. Another example is those public servants who promoted 'economic rationalism' in the 1980s at the federal level (Pusey, 1991); we could conclude from Pusey's work that they not only had the appropriate habitus, but also had amassed extensive capital which enabled them to influence the shape of the field.

In living inside the developing narrative of economic rationalism, an employee would have to have a feel for the game that maximises a certain social trajectory, as this is part of the living of an autobiography. There is the question of whether employees may be encouraged to pursue their own goods in a manner separate from the goods at the level of 'the organisation', and even field, in which they seek to work.

It is also appropriate to consider whether any opposition could have come from the relationship between the two original organisations. For those at Anessa the enemy was not only the State Government, the enemy was their neighbour Isengate who was seen in the symbolic war as the agent of a takeover bid.

Fan – I'm sure they see it as a bit regressive.

Bonna – And as a takeover?

Fan – Oh yes ... certainly when we were building up to amalgamation ... some of the councillors [of Anessa] went around with black armbands and all this sort of thing when they found out they were going to be amalgamated with Isengate .... Whereas we had a champagne party, because that was what we were working towards. It was the ... only real option other than to be split in two which we felt would have been just crazy (Interview with Fan, January 1995, p. 12).

(Note that Fan had been working at Isengate for ten years in a position as personal assistant to a department head).

The two organisations were not united in the stance towards local government change. As we saw from informants, at the time of the merger Isengate was already operating to a different narrative about local government reform.

Not only does the narrative activity of the State Government accord one shape to the future; it also constrains reauthorship activity to those who have the habitus consistent with a position of privilege in the narrative of economic rationalism. This can be construed as those who have the symbolic capital in the form of 'time and

space to tell a story'. In other words authorship, as part of this tradition of readings, can be characterised as having a purpose that is to do with meaning. This purpose is to present a public justification that is, understandably, consistent with its own position. The opposition, in this instance as counter-tradition and those who participate in it, is construed not only as separate, but also as having played no part in the achievement of the level of organisation which is self (Schelling, 1800/178), that is 'self' at the level of Solmarco. Recognition, or better, non-recognition of a counter-tradition, at this level becomes part of authorial strategy.

By his account, Bourdieu can be seen to promote the counter-tradition by relating an understanding about neoliberalism from a position of opposition. Rather than agreeing that what is described is a reality that has within it no dissenting voice, Bourdieu reminds us, through his action of reauthorship, that there is a larger whole to which this neo-liberalist position is a response. He demonstrates by doing this that "community with reciprocal action is basic" (Gare, in press-b), and that the process of self-organisation consists of opposed activities limiting each other (that is, as social position and counterposition). This is consonant with Schelling's ideas to the extent that a force in opposition to the self is not independent to the self (Esposito, 1977; Schelling, 1800/1978).

The theory of reading suggests that an authorial strategy which attempts to impose one narrative will generate its own counterpart rhetorically in a community or tradition of readings. During the merger, as we have seen, there were several possible communal positions that could be engaged in reauthorship. These positions could

include senior management, the unions and other government departments; included as well are the organisations of Anessa and Isengate.

Some of the accounts of 'economic rationalism' shown above are related by those in opposition to it, but we can also appreciate from the account of the new CEO of Solmarco that there are those allied to it, for example there is the beginning within Solmarco of reauthorship activity. The narrative requires reauthorship to suit management in local government. With regard to the qualities of the text, there is a 'who' that can be considered, which I have considered so far in relation to 'membership'. Within 'economic rationalism' there could also be a presupposition that acquiescence by readers is inherent to the text, as well as being part of the strategies of the authors. In other words readers who are not allies are positioned as powerless characters, and passivity on the part of certain characters could be presupposed at the level of the text. Authorship accords the text a kind of autonomy that seeks to position the text itself as beyond reauthorship activity on the part of readers. This position indicates a presupposition that sources of opposition can be ignored. We could conclude that the authors believe their own rhetoric in the dominance of the product. That is, the product as 'economic rationalism' is deemed to take precedence even over the process whereby it came into being. The text gains an autonomy by virtue of its own qualities.

But we would have to argue that a text is open nevertheless. It has qualities of openness inherent to it, as we have seen argued above. Ricoeur (1984) reminds us that it is inevitable a text is schematic; it has indeterminacy with respect to meaning. No text is ever complete because what it presents is an invitation to a reader; it is the

latter who achieves new meaning through the active engagement of imagination. This can be seen in the narrative of economic rationalism; for example the richness of meaning as a textual quality tends to be developed in regard to the activity of achieving 'efficiency', but how employees are to do this and still provide 'adequate public services' is perhaps not adequately addressed. 'Economic rationalism' must be open to reauthorship if it is to be a living product in the sense used by Schelling (1800/1978). No text ever accounts for the whole, and it is only living to the extent that it is open to further interpretation.

The similarity between the general theory of interpretation as it is described by Ricoeur and the economy of symbolic exchanges as it is described by Bourdieu (1991) marks a major point of intersection between these two authors. For Ricoeur it is the layers of meaning that require interpretation at the level of symbol, and for Bourdieu it is at this symbolic level that there is a trade in meaning, or what he calls a symbolic exchange. For Bourdieu (1991):

Symbols are the instruments par excellence of 'social integration': as instruments of knowledge and communication, they make it possible for there to be consensus on the meaning of the social world, a consensus which contributes fundamentally to the reproduction of the social order. 'Logical' integration is the precondition of 'moral' integration (p. 166).

We have seen that Ricoeur employs the analogy of reading in his explanations; reading becomes the quintessential action through which all actions can be understood. Whereas for Bourdieu, it is through proximity and shared interest that persons recognise themselves as part of the same project, a project that in turn leads

to mutual recognition, for Ricoeur we have on a similar level a community of readers and a tradition of readings. We have seen that according to the State Government some characters in the narrative of local government reform are authorised to act in the space of organisation and some are not. As part of this the sources of existing opposition in the narrative-making space of the organisation seem to be denied any powers of authorship. They are not recognised as forms of opposition that could be powerful in a reauthorship sense. While MacIntyre (1981) argues that human beings can be held to account for that which they author, it is apparent that part of the State Government narrative was the attempt, through dominance of authorship, to disempower or render passive any potentially effective opposing force that could make the State Government accountable for its actions.

In appropriating and valuing the narrative of economic rationalism the State Government positions itself in alliance with market forces. We have seen in this narrative a favoured character is business, in the sense that 'business activity' provides the counterposition to 'public service activity', and the former is seen to be accountable to 'the market' and 'market forces' rather than the electorate. From this we can see the shifting in membership, construed as the positioning in regard to the text of economic rationalism and how this is being reauthored in the narrative-making space of Solmarco. We could conclude that the State Government is attempting to make local government more accountable through its intervention, and that employees are caught up in this activity. But there could, nevertheless, be employees who felt optimistic about the future, retained membership in the new organisation,



and were able to capitalise on this in regard to the constraints imposed on meaning, position and narrative activity.

Having set the scene regarding the complexity that employees could be said to be reading, it is now appropriate to return to the activity of reading as a lead in to a consideration of the story parts that were gathered from informants to this thesis. While no claim can be made to a comprehensive treatment in this part, nevertheless we could conclude that narrative activity is present in the organisation as a process of becoming, and that this has the potential to be formative of the conditions in which a new sense of self could be emergent for employees.

We have seen in this section that because the organisation of Solmarco was created as a sub-field, the State Government was able to place spatial constraints that closed the narrative-making space to membership by those who would conserve economic rationalism as a living evolving narrative, and that this was formative on the capacity of others to engage in reauthorship of the organisation as a process of becoming. Both agents as groups, and agents as persons, found themselves being constrained according to any powers of re-authorship that they might be able to exercise in regard to the new organisation, Solmarco. In particular there was a new CEO, the senior managers from the two former organisations had by-and-large lost their positions, and the previously powerful groups such as unions were also curtailed in their activity. We could conclude that some employees had the symbolic capital in the space, and an appropriate habitus, to enable their activity of authorship, but that some were cast as passive characters whose authorship activity was to be constrained

in regard to the evolving community of action at the level of the new organisation, Solmarco.

So far in this part we have considered some of the complexity that was present at the time of the merger of Anessa and Isengate. These dynamics shape the emergent Solmarco in ways that are possibly more complex than those that shaped the two previous organisations. We can appreciate how the State Government of Victoria undertook major reform of local government, and employees could both read the State Government position in their reports, but also live inside this major reform.

In regard to complexity we have seen: some ways in which the process of narrative transformation at the level of social spaces could be understood; how the lives of new larger narratives can be traced, alongside those which become discredited; that an organisation, when defined as 'sub-field', is part of narrative activity that shapes both fields and traditions; that organisations are influenced by the larger narratives that are actively emergent in a field of action such as that of government; that there was uncertainty for the employees of Solmarco in regard to the claims being made by the State Government and whether these could be sustained; and that for employees the few months after the merger announcement had temporal qualities that were achievements of this unfolding process at the level of lived experience.

Furthermore we saw that the position being argued for local government reform by the State Government is a version of 'economic rationalism', and that this has a history as a narrative in a tradition of readings known as 'neoliberalism'. We saw that the State Government had the symbolic capital which enabled a powerful

position of authorship on their part, and that they sought to ensure the continued life of this narrative by appointing a new CEO to Solmarco who was in favour of the evolution of this story. We saw some of the temporal qualities that could be present in the organisation as a 'becoming-text', and how economic rationalism is a position that could constrain employees in regard to their future contribution. We saw that the State Government was able to place spatial constraints that closed the narrative-making space to membership by those who would conserve economic rationalism as a living evolving narrative, and that this was formative on the capacity of others to engage in reauthorship of the organisation as a process of becoming. We saw that some employees had the symbolic capital in the space, and an appropriate habitus, to enable their activity of authorship, but that some were cast as passive characters whose authorship activity was to be constrained in regard to the evolving community of action at the level of the new organisation, Solmarco. We could conclude from the above that this complexity calls for a high level of narrative competence on the part of employees, but that this competence must itself be actively emergent as part of their own process of becoming.

### **5.5 Reading and the Activity of Employees**

According to MacIntyre (1981) people orient themselves in society through narratives:

I can only answer the question "what am I to do" if I can answer the prior question "of what story or stories do I find myself a part?" We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters – roles into which we

have been drafted – and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. It is through hearing stories ... that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are (p. 201).

And Carr (1986) makes a similar argument:

Natural and social events, such as the movements and actions of others around us, are configurations we follow through in time in spite of their discontinuities. Some of our more complex actions are performed discontinuously as well, and in the intervals we are occupied with other actions which serve other ends. Each of these is like a distinguishable "story-line" constituted by our protentions, retentions, and intentions (p. 74).

And following on from MacIntyre and the other narrative theorists, Gare (1996) argues that persons are launched on a quest for coherence, and in doing this they represent themselves to each other as unfinished autobiographies or narratives. As part of formulating these, people define themselves with regard to a hierarchical order of projects, ranging from those that are short term to those that are about the significance of their lives. In this manner a person's activity is related to the biographies of others and the histories of the kinds of social forms we see described above.

Through this quest for coherence in their own lives people are aroused to search for coherence in the moral order, and beyond this, in the history of their families, communities, classes and nations, and in the history of civilisation and humanity itself (Gare, 1996, p. 360).

According to Gare (1996) the tension generated by this activity in all but the most oppressive societies, affords an impetus towards achieving cultural coherence. Participation in the dialectic of recognition, which is both spatially and temporally complex, and created and sustained by the struggle for recognition and respect, enables people to transcend their immediate being in the world. They then achieve the reflexivity necessary to integrate their disparate engagements into the unity of themselves as unfinished biographies, and hence become active moral agents. In the following part of this thesis we shall see how this can be applied to understand several employees as actively emergent beings in the months following the announcement of merger.

We saw above how Ricoeur (1984) describes the 'configurational' act as an act of composition or 'grasping together'. According to Ricoeur it is an act which extracts a configuration from what is otherwise a succession of events, but according to Carr (1986) we must emphasise that 'coherence' is already present in complex actions. For Carr (1986) this narrative grasp, or quasi-narration, holds the story together at the level of 'life-story'; it is a comprehensive grasp that "takes them all as mine and establishes the connections among them" (p. 75). 'All' includes both small and large-scale, short and long-term, experiences (or sufferings) and actions. He argues that the grasp, as an act of living the principles of unity, coherence and structure, is an action

performed. Such 'autobiographical' activity involves a response to the call of a multiplicity of projects spread out over time and even existing simultaneously in the present (Carr, 1986). What is called for is the activity of putting the whole together, and this is enabled by the activity of reading. Through this combination of activity a person could transcend a reversal and move to greater wisdom. Ricoeur (1984) argues that "we ought not to hesitate in comparing the production of the configurational act to the work of the productive imagination" (p. 68), and that the latter is not a psychologising faculty, but rather a transcendental one. And for Schelling (1800/1978):

Organization as such is succession hampered and, as it were, coagulated in its course ... now the intelligence was to intuit, not merely the succession of its presentations as such, but itself, and itself as active in the succession .... the internal succession, outwardly intuited, is motion. Hence the intelligence will be able to intuit itself only in an object that has an internal principle of motion within itself. But an object such as this is said to be alive. Hence the intelligence must intuit itself, not merely *qua* organization as such, but as living organization .... Since the intelligence is to intuit itself as active in the successions throughout the whole of organic nature, every organization must also possess life in the wider sense of the word, that is, must have an inner principle of motion within itself. The life in question may well be more or less restricted; the question, therefore: whence this distinction? reduces itself to the previous one: whence the graduated sequence in organic nature? (p. 124).

MacIntyre (1977) posits that there is an ability here that is to do with narrative making. We have seen how he argues that this is exemplified in the contribution of Galileo, because the superiority of the latter was his ability to make a coherent narrative that enabled the work of his predecessors, on various sides of the ongoing argument in science, to be evaluated by a common set of standards.

Hence it is misleading to understand the relationship between the world of the text and the world of the reader as limited to the author's sphere of influence. Ricoeur argues that there are certainly texts in which the author sets out to influence the reader such that the reading choices available are already encoded within the text, as we have seen above in the position of the State Government, but there are also texts wherein the reader's responsibility for her choices becomes overwhelming. This is the dynamic captured by what Ricoeur regards as the paradox of reading: on the one hand readers can be seduced or terrorised into limited reading choices, and on the other readers can confront in the text indeterminate structures that have the quality of provoking endless interpretations, and disturbing indeterminacy. Ricoeur argues that it is the consideration of this paradox which pushes a theory of reading into phenomenology, as an understanding of the reader's experience is not exhausted by an analysis of the coherence of the author's strategy as it is instantiated in the text. If we are speaking purely of rhetoric, Ricoeur (1991a) argues that the reader is the prey or victim of the authorial strategy (or possibly of an implied author) and this is an effect of the extent to which this strategy is concealed. Whether reading is a trusting journey in the company of a reliable narrator or whether it is a struggle with an implied author, the journey inevitably leads back to the reader herself; hence a theory

of the reader's response is required if we are to understand the stratagems of the author.

Ricoeur argues that an individual reader or a reading public can be considered within a theory of the reader's response. While the illusion that reading is extrinsic to the text is endlessly reborn (Ricoeur, 1991a), we are assured that "Without the reader who accompanies it, there is no configuring act at work in the text; and without a reader to appropriate it, there is no world unfolded before the text" (p. 395). We could say on the basis of the above that the text of economic rationalism is treated by its authors as having an autonomy that is not warranted; even attempts to eliminate sources of opposition do not give the text the 'closure' that may be desired by its creators.

There are some features of the relationship between a reader and a text which taken together make reading a "truly vital experience" (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 169). Firstly he suggests that there can be a frustrating of the configuration act of the reader, for example where the reader expects to find a configuration, the plot may be barely sketched out, and then the task of the reader to interpret it is exercised to a great degree. Ricoeur argues (1991a) that reading itself becomes a drama of discordant concordance. Gone is the reliable narrator and the safety of a familiar and accompanied journey. The spaces or places of indeterminate meaning in the text are part of the author's strategy, as we saw above, but they are also part of the effort the reader exerts to make concordance out of discordance. Note that 'concordance' could be taken to cover the meaning, the temporality and the positioning that we have been considering above. In giving form, or more form, to what otherwise lacks definite



form or structure, the reader responds to the invitation to engage in the process of emplotment. The second dialectical feature, according to Ricoeur (1988), is the presence in the text of an excess of meaning, the text "appears, by turns, both lacking and excessive in relation to reading" (p. 169). This could for example be a feature of narratives where there seem to be different levels of interpretation possible; a text can satisfy both initiates and experts as in many religious texts and traditional tales. Thirdly he suggests that in the search for coherence readers can be too successful, such that the unfamiliar becomes familiar. If this happens readers feel themselves to be on an equal footing with the work, and come to believe in it so completely that they lose themselves in it. It is at this level of 'reader' that we can consider the agent as person.

According to the theory of reading a reader subordinates her expectations to those developed by the text and the extent to which this happens shapes the extent to which that reader becomes unreal to herself. "Our analysis of the act of reading leads us to say ... that the practice of narrative lies in a thought experiment by means of which we try to inhabit worlds foreign to us" (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 179). This movement is one which takes the reader out of a familiar world and into the world of the text thus opening the reader to a world of possible meanings, and new modes of being in the world (Kearney, 1988).

It is in this relationship that encompasses both the reader and the text that we find there is a distance to be crossed, but that the activity of crossing is productive. Ricoeur argues that it is at the level of the text that this distancing or 'distanciation' is the condition of 'understanding'. In terms of this movement or dialectic the 'right'

distance from a work is the one from which the illusion is, by turns, irresistible and untenable, but he also posits that a balance between these two impulses is never achieved (Ricoeur, 1988). In other words what is achieved is a precarious relationship between text and reader (Ricoeur, 1988) and we have seen above how the question of creative freedom in this relationship is not a simple one (Ricoeur, 1991a). The balance sought is unstable because of the dynamism, which is centred on whether the structure of the text or configuration is equal to the refiguration achieved by the reader. The meaning achieved in the action of reading rests on the dialogical relationship established between the work and its public, so the effect produced is included in the boundaries of the work itself (Ricoeur, 1988). In other words if we return to the ideas of Schelling (1800/1978), self-organisation is an activity that has within it the activity/passivity dynamic; that which opposes self is not separate to self.

Stated in terms of narrative theory we have seen that the text is closed, in the sense that it has narrative structure, but that this can only ever be a temporary stabilisation of meaning because a reader can refigure the configuration of the text into new meaning. In terms of power it is appropriate to say that a work has the power to prefigure an experience that the reader is yet to have, but counterbalanced to this is the experience that the reader already has to bring to reading.

Ricoeur (1988) thus argues that "every work is not only an answer provided to an earlier question but a source of new questions" (p. 170). In other words the work not only opens up distances to be crossed or what can be called a new horizon of experience, but there is also effort or work involved in the crossing. The pleasure of

the text offered to the reader is the power to open a space in meaning, a space in which the logic of question and answer unfold (Ricoeur, 1988).

Carr (1986) considers that what is achieved for persons is authenticity, and that this is not only to do with the achievement of narrative coherence in a life, but is also about choice. This choice concerns the narratives we both choose to belong to, and choose, through acts of authorship in our own life and the responsibility we take for engaging in such acts of authorship. Like the other narrative theorists he argues that one cannot separate narrative from authorship, and he contends that authenticity is about choosing the story in which one is a character. Therefore the extent to which we can belong to polyphonic social spaces such as fields alerts us to the conditions that could be present to foster such an achievement.

We can to some extent choose the narratives in which we become a character. This suggests that there will be a sense of different possible futures, and therefore characters, in an organisation where the vitality of the argument is honoured; that is, the possibility of authenticity is enhanced. Enough narrative coherence is required, perhaps as captured by Honneth (1996) when he refers to "the widest variety of life-goals without losing the solidarity-generating force of the collective identity-formation" (p. 179), which has been partially understood here as a dynamic of sedimentation/innovation. Through the vitality of multiple narratives we provide the conditions of identity-formation, but also through the unity of the quest at the level of tradition and social space. One can both belong to the ongoing argument and attend to the health of that argument and one can participate in the active emergence of organisations by honouring the diversity of narratives. We saw this above in Morson's

(1994) ideas about sideshadowing, and Honneth's (1996) ideas about culture as an actively emergent being.

It is in the context of these ideas that the theory of narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1992) provides a way to ask about the nature of the positioning of employees into 'passive characters' – that is as characters in the narrative authored by the State Government, but characters whose own capacity to cross the distance to the text could be limited by what the State Government has done. Self-organisation at the level of person could be more challenging given the complexities that are considered above. For example, compared to the previous organisations, Anessa and Isengate, it is appropriate to consider how Solmarco has a complex existence in relation to the field because of the intervention by the State Government. Employees are expected to solve the problem of how public services could be improved according to the new CEO's expectations, but a large budget cut can also be achieved in the service of 'efficiency' as a value that is being upheld in the community of action at the level of field. Solmarco is a government organisation whose activity, once perhaps construed as 'public service for the sake of public service', is now changed because of a different narrative that accords a position for 'the market'. We have seen above that the market, and persons who come from other fields, are invited into local government through the agency of the State Government. They are invited to take up a more active position in the field and tradition, and are symbolically recognised as contributors to, and members in, the ongoing argument over what constitutes a public service at the level of local government organisations.

It is appropriate at this stage to return to the theory of Allen and Starr (1982) that we saw briefly at the beginning of this thesis. While the State Government claims that its narrative about local government reform will dominate, there are few openings for refiguration and those who would engage in it. Allen and Starr (1982) posit that some systems are non-nested; that is, there is some freedom to act at the lower levels of the hierarchy. Nevertheless there could be moves to turn such a hierarchy into a nested system where considerable control over the lower level activities is a feature of the system itself. They suggest that there is a difference between conservation principles that are reasonable and enabling of self-organisation, and those that do not allow emergence. This suggests that there could be facilitative constraints. These could be the conditions that enable both organisations, at the level of activity that is sub-field, and employees, to be processes of becoming that are enabled to act back on the conditions of their own formation. Through recognition of the importance of facilitative constraints, the productivity in lives could be fostered. According to the State Government, local government is to be made more accountable in relation to ratepayers and the services that ratepayers receive. At this system level the State level of government seems to force local government into a relationship that is more constrained to what the State Government wants.

From the above we could conclude that for the employees of Solmarco there is considerable complexity to be engaged with at the time of the merger, but that the paths to this engagement may also be limited. We could also conclude that this extends well beyond the reading of the organisation cultures that may have been present in Anessa and Isengate. Solmarco is a new organisation with complex

dynamics of its own, and its unfolding has been constrained by a conservatism that seeks to institute new levels of constraint that issue from the field and that were probably not there for the old organisations. The task of gaining the capital that might enable a new sense of self to be narrated could be challenging for an employee, given that the forces of conservatism may be over-constraining of self-organising forces (Allen & Starr, 1982). We can now turn to how particular employees, as informants to this thesis, were engaged in this activity of presenting themselves as an unfinished autobiography. Their challenge is to live at the delicate balance where these forces of constraint become transforming or disabling.

In this part we have seen how the notion that there are 'constraints' on employee activity can be understood in regard to the activity that the State Government was engaged in. We have seen how the various levels of self-organisation are emergent and that these constraints are properties of this emergence. The levels have been construed as the new organisation of Solmarco, and the field of government in Australia. As part of the relationship of these levels a narrative about local government reform is authored by the State Government and consequent to this certain constraints are imposed on 'employees' as characters in that narrative who are positioned into passivity. Ostensibly the narrative is enabling of the activity of ratepayers and players in the wider market beyond government. These become privileged according to the argument being made by the State Government in the ongoing argument over what constitutes public service activity, but at the time of this research this had not been played out to its full extent and employees were living inside the uncertainty of these claims. There was no reliable narrator and nor was

there a familiar text. Instead there were a variety of distances to be crossed, and these called for a level of narrative competence that some employees would possibly not have.

## **Part 6 Employee Stories: Inside the Lived Experience of an Organisational Merger**

By now it will be apparent that the process of making a personal account is part of some larger and complex dynamics, and that there is a community of action (Gare, in press-a) at the level of 'the organisation' as sub-field. Consonant with the above it is argued that this community is engaged in the process of 'making meaning' through the dynamics of the ongoing argument, and that narrative activity and positioning are central to this process. It is argued that 'self' is an ongoing process of becoming that exists simultaneously with other processes of becoming, and we shall see in the following accounts how this activity of the emergent self at the level of a person is simultaneous with communal activity at the time of a merger.

According to Ricoeur (1984) the three narrative operations described above as prefiguration, configuration and refiguration, form a hermeneutic circle of narrative and time; the process occurs over and over again, being reborn and played out in a constant way. Practical experience of the world of action precedes the process of emplotment and succeeding it is a return to the world of action; in other words the action of emplotment begins in the world of action and returns the individual to it. With regard to a hermeneutics of reading we can say that following the narrative making there is an act of reading.

In Ricoeur's theory the action of 'reading' becomes a metaphor for all action which occurs at the relationship of worlds (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 79). The agent as 'reader' takes action on the basis of narratives about what is possible and what can be



done, and Ricoeur emphasises that such agency has suffering as its counterpart. We have seen how this circle of narrative is not an unproductive circle which returns to its own starting point; it is more like a spiral, one of interpretation and understanding, which occurs in time and moves on. Hermeneutics is thus concerned with the whole narrative process as process – the whole arc of operations – not just with the 'texts' which are an achievement of the process and the 'readers' who engage in the process. Hermeneutics is about the relationship which is the process, and Ricoeur (1984) argues that an individual's competence in it therefore constitutes "practical understanding" (p. 55); to master the process is to have competence in the world of action and competence in relationships. This is similar to Bourdieu's argument that having a feel for the game in a field is to master in a practical way the future of the game (Bourdieu, 1998b), and one's position in it.

On the basis of a theory of reading Ricoeur (1984) argues that there are some features of the relationship between a reader and a text that, when taken together, make reading a truly vital experience. Reading a text involves a pause in an unreal world, a pause wherein reflection occurs, and it is in this reflection that a reader subordinates her expectations to those developed by the text. The extent to which this happens shapes the extent to which that reader becomes unreal to herself. The more that a reader becomes unreal in her reading, the more profound and far-reaching will be the work's influence on the world of the reader (Ricoeur, 1991a). It is here that we start to glimpse the influence of some organisational and field transformations in the lives of persons. The 'right' distance from a work is that whereby the illusion is, in turns, irresistible and untenable, hence the reader enters into a precarious relationship

and the question of creative freedom in this relationship is not a simple one (Ricoeur, 1991a). Creative freedom in making a response to 'Who am I?' is caught in the dynamism centred on whether the structure of the text or configuration is equal to the refiguration achieved by the reader. We can understand that a text is closed, in the sense that it has narrative structure, but that this can only ever be a temporary stabilization of meaning because a reader can refigure the configuration of the text into new meaning. In terms of power it is appropriate to say that a work has the power to prefigure an experience that the reader is yet to have, but counterbalanced to this is the experience that the reader already has to bring to reading. Readers participate, as do authors, in the sedimented expectations of the general reading public and it is in relationship that they are constituted as competent readers. It is argued that this theory can be applied to consider the accounts of some employees who acted as informants to this research project in the months following the announcement that Anessa and Isengate would merge.

It is important to note that if this were a study in the spirit of the rationality/integration/market position (Reed, 1996), whereby narrative analysis is adopted (Brown, 1998; Czarniawska, 1997b; O'Connor, 1997, 2000; Pentland, 1999; Pitt, 1998; Reissman 1993; Stevenson & Greenberg, 1998), the theory developed so far would be applied now to analyse these story parts as if they were products with certain discoverable qualities, for example the differences between various stories may be given prominence. We might also begin to infer, using such an approach, that the stories from one organisation differed from those in the other, or that employees in Anessa had a bigger gap between their story and the new story of Solmarco. But in

this thesis employees are construed as processes of becoming who are able to make an account in relation to the question "Who am I?". In this regard, at the level of activity that is 'thesis', there is a both/and approach. The story parts given in the following sections have some capacity to stand alone, and a capacity to be read in the context of the meaning shown above. Clearly for each informant they are also parts of a life, at the level of activity that is 'person'. While we may not be privileged to know the whole of which they are a part at this level of reading activity, nevertheless we can gain some sense of the process that an informant is engaged in. In this regard the story parts are the achievements that the informants will themselves refigure in the process of becoming. In researching this process of becoming it is inappropriate to treat activity/passivity as less than a property of process (Schelling, 1800/1978). Consonant with the above it is argued that this dynamic cannot be turned into a product for the purpose of study, even though an account of it is achievable as a narrative that takes the form of a thesis that is available for reading.

### **6.1 Ki: "luck favours the prepared"**

Ki had been the CEO of Isengate, but having been positioned as a passive character in the narrative of local government reform he was shifted to an interim post, and effectively dismissed, in late 1994. This followed the announcements by the State Government about local government reform in this region. The first interview with Ki occurred after he had been shifted into the temporary position, but before he had found a new ongoing position.

We saw above how MacIntyre (1977, 1981) argues that people orient themselves through narratives. As the City Manager (CEO) of Isengate, Ki had been

deeply involved in developing strategies to respond to the actions of the State Government and to influence the future of Isengate. In the lead up to the State Government announcements he worked closely with the elected councillors and Isengate senior staff to put several proposals to the State Government and in one sense they won as we saw above. Those who had influence at the level of the City of Isengate were determined that the City would not be 'carved up' and they wanted an amalgamation with the City of Anessa that would make a whole that they believed would be in the best interests of both Cities. Of the several proposals put by the City of Isengate, we have seen that this is the proposition that was accepted. We could conclude that several possible futures were narrated for the organisation, and that this was a strategy of authorship on the part of the City. Ki's narrative-making activity was central to this achievement, and when he effectively lost his position, through being transferred, we could conclude that he was both prepared and unprepared for what was happening. On the one hand we shall see that he successfully retains a position at the level of field, but on the other he was positioned as being outside the membership of the new narrative-making space that was created at the level of 'the organisation', Solmarco. In regard to the latter we could say that he was characterised as passive according to the narrative given by the State Government about local government reform, and he was constrained by this action. The CEOs of Isengate and Anessa were to have neither an active position, nor an authorship capacity, in the new organisation of Solmarco. We can consider how this played out for Ki.

Bonna – So that was a decision that you weren't expecting? To be shifted along like that?

Ki – Well – early in the piece I guess we had hoped – I had hoped that I would stay at Isengate with a combination of Anessa and Isengate, but as it got closer I guess mentally I realised that that wasn't going to happen. They did that in the last round and there was a lot of criticism of it ... that it smacked of partiality. That the CEO who stayed, you know, brought baggage with him or her. So it was pretty clear – I suppose about November – that I wasn't going to stay there at least not for the interim job but that was ... I mean intellectually I understood that, [but] emotionally I hadn't accepted that until the last 48 hours ....

Bonna – So it came as somewhat of a shock?

Ki – Not as a shock, no, because I knew it was going to happen, but I hadn't really started to think about what that meant until ... I suppose the last week or ten days. Then the last day or two days – I mean I didn't know where I was coming until about seven days before it happened (Interview with Ki, January 1995, p. 7).

Most of the CEOs were dismissed in the region, but some, including Ki, were appointed into interim CEO positions at other local government organisations that were newly formed because of the amalgamations.

Ki – You didn't know when you were going to get a job when it happened and it wasn't until seven days before it actually happened that [I found out] I was going to get the interim job here and in that period I couldn't tell anybody.

Bonna – Yes ... other people have said that you had like only a few hours really to move on. And obviously you couldn't tell anybody.

Ki – Yes. No, I couldn't tell anybody where I was going and yet I had to keep saying – well a couple of weeks beforehand I was trying to say to people "When this amalgamation occurs – whether I'm here or not" – it was that sort of process. Not only getting me used to that idea, but also getting my people used to the idea that I wouldn't be here or the odds are – or if I was here, that I'd lost 'cause I wouldn't have got an interim job (Interview with Ki, January 1995, p. 5).

He says he was caught in the suddenness of the State Government actions:

Ki – We had a briefing on the Wednesday night, and on the Thursday morning the formal announcement, and even as late as Wednesday afternoon I was talking about going back and telling them on Thursday morning what has happened. But I realised on Wednesday night, as I drove home from the City (Melbourne as the State capital), that on Thursday after the announcement I would be coming here (to the interim CEO position). So I actually dropped in at Isengate to pick up a couple of things and had the opportunity to say goodbye to a couple of people who were closest to me – my secretary and group managers – but of course they realised that night or that day, or whatever, that they really ought to be getting ready for their new interim CEO. So it was a very rapid changeover (Interview with Ki, January 1995, p. 5).

Ki had been influential at Isengate, and we have seen above that he had what could be characterised as a complex grasp of his place in these dynamics of organisation and field. We shall see in the following that Ki has to respond afresh to 'who am I?', but from his new position, as he is no longer actively engaged in being the CEO of Solmarco. Through a theory of reading we can understand how this complex creative activity is a dynamic process unfolding in time. Because the world of the work unfolds, discovers, and reveals, to understand is to understand oneself in front of the text, which is not closed in upon itself as it too has a life (Ricoeur, 1991c). The proposed world in front of the text is a proposed self that is constituted in the relationship of the world of the work and the world of the reader. "As a reader, I find myself only by losing myself" (Ricoeur, 1991c, p. 88). While for Ki there is a new world, he is still the agent who carries the mediation past this point. Based on Carr (1986) we could conclude that he finds himself positioned as a character that is quite different than that in his own account he is living. But from this point he also has no authorship capacity in the narrative of local government reform as he is excluded from the new organisation being formed, that is Solmarco. His capacity to continue his project of being a CEO is limited or constrained by what is happening in the relationship of field to organisation.

According to Ricoeur (1984) this capacity for synthesis, which we see in Ki's accounting, is fundamental to the power of the productive imagination. Thus simultaneity of activity and passivity is formative at the level of person and consistent with the ideas of Schelling (1800/1978). We also saw that the grasp, as an act of living the principles of unity, coherence and structure, is an action performed (Carr,

1986). Such 'autobiographical' activity involves a response to the call of a multiplicity of projects spread out over time and even existing simultaneously in the present. The reduction of the grasp that Ki is achieving, therefore becomes a kind of question, and in Ki's life this could be characterised as a brutal question that comes with the forces of action and struggle in the field. There is a sudden removal of the richness and complexity he has already achieved. In this constraint life does become, even if momentarily, a mere sequence (Carr, 1986), and what is stripped away is the complex of meaning that we could say he is engaged in through authorship activity in his own life. The State Government point of view transforms events into a story by telling them (Carr, 1986), reduces the CEOs into passive characters in the ongoing narrative and this is an invitation to open again that process of making complexity. In other words the process of imposing this sequence, for example in Ki's life, does not necessarily overcome the very ordering activity that agents are engaged in. When he is positioned as not being a City Manager (CEO) of a large and complex local government organisation in the form of Isengate, life is reduced for Ki, as we see above related by him, to a sequence of getting in the car, travelling back from the location of hearing the news of his dismissal, returning to his office "to pick up a couple of things and ... say goodbye to a couple of people who were closest to me" (Interview with Ki, January, 1995: p. 5). For Ki there could be restriction of the freedom (Schelling, 1800/1978) to engage in the activity of making new complexity, the source of this constraint being his relationship with the State Government, which we have seen above positions him as passive.



If organisation is an achievement at the level of person there is nevertheless the process that keeps the person active. A new narrative position is sought by Ki to adequately account for self, and self is alive. In other words the life in question may well be more or less restricted, but the question of selfhood remains. Hence it seems unlikely, except as a response of short duration, that someone like Ki would remain in a closed off or passive position, thereby accepting an injunction to be passive with respect to authorship. Even though he said "Well, I'll go and find something else to do or ... start organising mid-week sailing or something" (Interview with Ki, January, 1995, p. 17), and this seemed to be a possible narrative for a future life, we saw above how active he was in the previous transformation of Isengate. He did not position himself as inactive, nor ready to take this position. When he spoke of his approach to managing change he emphasised that managers have a responsibility to their staff in times of organisational transformation, but what he says also narrates how he both took a position and was positioned as part of the activity at the level of the organisation.

Ki – Well, we spent a lot of time last year. I suppose we began in June with every person in the organisation. Put them through a two day session in groups of 15 to 20 ... the first day was about coping with change – "how do I react to change" – this is the normal pattern and this sort of thing and the second one practical skills – "what are my skills - how do I market them, how do I write a resumé, how do I apply for a job, how do I get an interview" that sort of thing. And with the managers ... we put that group through a program with [a management consultant], a very extensive program that [they] run. It's

their outplacement program basically, but we did it before they lost their jobs. And we put them through it on the basis that when everybody else, including them, was feeling faint and concerned, they had to have enough self-confidence to stand up and manage the uncertainty amongst their troops – so that was good preparation ... so you knew it was coming .... But, I mean there were other things we were talking about ... a whole host of things at the same time and I guess the most important thing we were hoping to get through to people was that nobody can guarantee you certainty, anybody who does is a charlatan. That was the first thing, and the second thing was that you've got more control over your future than you might think. They were two things we were trying to get through, and I guess they thought the organisation was gonna help them, but even that couldn't be guaranteed. Because if the organisation changed, you know changed their policy – you can't even be sure of that, so you can't deliver that either (Interview with Ki, January 1995, p. 8).

Here Ki is active in claiming for himself the authorship that he regards as his, and he is urging others to take a similar stance. The extent to which this process was central to his own living out of a narrative identity is apparent in his contribution to the space of organisation, and we can appreciate from his own account of Anessa how the passive or contrary position could be characterised. We saw above how critical he was of the management at Anessa and their lack of preparedness. "They only had one preferred option ... to stay as they were, which was ridiculous ... but they kept

digging in, digging in, digging in, telling people how terrible this would be ... they were powerless to do anything" (Interview with Ki, January 1995, p. 11).

We have seen that Ki brought a business background to his management activity at Isengate. While he was not totally in agreement with the State Government position on economic reforms, and we saw that he referred disparagingly to 'the religion of Spring Street', he was in favour of enlarged local government organisations and the contributions these could make to economic development of local regions.

Perhaps because he had come from a business background and was also, as we have seen, keen to introduce business practices into Isengate, Ki positioned business as active in his narrative and the future of the City of Isengate. He spoke of attracting industry, encouraging job creation and the importance of "partnership working between industry and residents in the area" (Interview with Ki, January 1995, p. 13). Business was an important member at the level of the City and the councillors. By his account this was local government reform, but it was introduced gradually at the level of sub-field. There seemed to be some shared meaning as to the 'goods' being pursued; that is, both his purpose and that at the level of 'the organisation' were coherent.

Ki – ... eventually it's the people that matter. ....Bonna – are you sad to be leaving those people behind?

Ki – Yes, Yes, yeah – because it takes a long time to build that sort of a group up. I mean the first two or three years at Isengate were bloody tough .... the staff didn't trust me, the council had appointed me into the position after

they'd filled the subordinate positions underneath me. One of my subordinates was sleeping with one of the councillors and that was the area that I had to move into first ... yes, so it wasn't real easy, and the mayor – they'd effectively been without the other CEO .... The mayor had been running it almost as a full-time job and of course he didn't want to back out of any of the things he'd set up. So it took a long while to work through and gain some confidence – waiting for some of the staff and council to turn over and gradually to get a bit of order and direction into the place. Yes and there was a lot more we could have done. Although there were limits, limitations on what you could do at Isengate, I mean Isengate was no where near big enough to have the impact, next to the impact that something like Solmarco can have (Interview with Ki, January 1995, p. 12).

This suggests that Ki had an appreciation of the field dynamics and the State Government/local government relationship. This was also seen in more detail above where he reflects on the influence of 'the religion of Spring Street' in relation to the 'client-provider' split that was introduced as part of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT). And we see this again in another story part as he relates it:

Bonna – It really struck me [that] people at Isengate are talking about shop-front services and that sort of thing –

Ki – Yes, well that's one of the conversions that I – took me bloody six years, well not six years, but the first couple of years with councillors who didn't want that and then – well I didn't fight them. I just waited and then I worked it in bit by bit as councillors changed and they got used to the idea of having it.

In the end they didn't make the decision, it just happened. Prior to that it would have been a federal offence, a federal case, yeah, constitutional change – But it takes time to do that and you need the confidence of the staff, that what's happening makes sense. Otherwise they go running to councillors and –

Bonna – and undermining [because] they don't see what you are doing (Interview with Ki, January 1995, p. 20).

We can see from the above that Ki was engaged in local government reform; he was a major player and had considerable powers of authorship. In Ki's narrative about Isengate we can see a gradual change, where local government is characterised as being able to provide efficient public services in a manner that is akin to ratepayer expectations, but also as being repositioned so that there is an expanded contribution to business development in the region. As argued by MacIntyre (1977) there can be a successful new position that is achievable such that its predecessors can be understood in a newly intelligible way, and we saw that in his example regarding Galileo. This would appear to be in the nature of the narrative activity that Ki is engaged in.

These contributions suggest that Ki was a competent player at the level of sub-field, and that his narrative-making both encompassed plans for the future and made sense of the dynamics of the ongoing argument. Part of his strategy was to influence how employees were placed in relation to the argument over how best to govern at the local level. But this astuteness was unlikely to be of benefit to him, or others, if he lost membership at the level of the field. We saw that he had already lost

it at the level of Solmarco, and had turned his strategies to the larger narrative-making space in a bid to retain some authorship capacity in relation to the actions of the State Government.

Alongside a possible future as a 'midweek sailor', Ki also described himself in January 1995 as 'being in the market' for another CEO position in local government. Because of the dismissal of CEOs across the region there were many positions being advertised at this level of local government organisations. He had applied for several, including Solmarco when it was advertised. When asked about the process of applying for another position, he reflected on how he had not previously been in such a state of uncertainty. Until this point all of his career decisions had been at his own instigation; he spoke of applying for a new position from the strength inherent in already having a job. Through its authorship the State Government did not seem to accord an active part to existing senior management employees in its narrative activity, again we could say that they were positioned as passive and the intent was to constrain them. This is exemplified in the next story part that shows the extent to which senior staff in local government were precluded from participating in the process of appointing even the acting CEOs. In spite of the advice he gives to others, as we saw above, that one should make the effort at control, Ki also asserts that personal control over one's future is relative. We can appreciate from the following the extent to which even someone at the senior level of CEO could find themselves characterised as passive in regard to the process.

(Note that the following story part refers to 'state parliamentarians'. These are the members elected to the two houses of parliament at the State Government level.

While their electoral districts are separate to those of local government, it is still possible to speak of 'my local Member of Parliament' because the State is divided into districts for the purpose of State elections. In other words a resident of Victoria votes in elections for State representatives, and in elections for local representatives, and for that matter for federal representatives – a total of three different electoral processes that occur at differing intervals and separated from each other).

Ki – I mean control is relative. It's an amazing system by which they relocated these [CEOs] – you see we were not employed by the State Government, we were employed in local government. The Minister [at the State level] decided who would go somewhere. Presumably it was the people in local government who made the recommendation ... there were no interviews or procedures or anything like that , no –

Bonna – So how did they make this decision?

Ki – Well, that's an interesting [question] – buggered if I know. But at one stage in late November I thought well I don't know how it works, but I am going to exert control over this at any points I can. I said to ... the Director for Local Government ... "I don't know how you are going to choose the interim CEOs, but here's my CV and I said here are the ones I'd like". I didn't get one of the ones I liked, but I didn't even think of this one, but nevertheless I said here are the ones I'd like and a couple of weeks later – and I had got just an acknowledgement back saying "Thank you for your application. It will be taken into consideration." – so I then thought well it won't be the Minister himself – they will have to ask other people and the most likely people to ask

will be the local parliamentarians [from State Government electorates], especially the Liberal Parliamentarians, so I wrote off to all the local parliamentarians you see – all my local parliamentarians – the ones I know, including the member for Anessa, who was on the opposite side of the argument, but who I think – well I think we'd established a mutual respect – and so I wrote off to them and said "I don't know how the system works but they might ask you for your thoughts and here's the letter so if you get asked I'd be pleased if you'd support my candidacy for these jobs."

Bonna – So you thought you had some way to contribute –

Ki – Yeah, and a couple of them came back and said they'd be pleased to. That was encouraging.

Bonna – But whether it actually had any effect you don't know.

Ki – Well I think it did – I think the opposite worked. If the local parliamentarians had said "No way" then I think it would certainly have had an effect. You see I got something back from one of the parliamentarians who was more open than others about what happens in the [Liberal/National] Party room and Cabinet and so forth, so [he said] "it came up and you'd be interested to know that everybody said you were 'good', so ..." and that's what I was saying to this group [of employees] here the other day. One of them was [saying] "local government used to be an area where you came for life and there were low wages, but high security, and it seems to be changing" ... and that gave me the opportunity to talk about the security issue and [I was] reassuring them that I'd keep them advised about what was happening, but it's



important that you start to realise that you have to take care of yourself. The planning is as much your responsibility or more your responsibility than anyone else, and particularly now (Interview with Ki, January 1995, p. 15).

We can see from this how Ki struggles to retain some powers of authorship at the level of field. He has enough competence to know where and how he could 'exert control over the process', and we can read how he positions himself to take advantage of his previous position and the recognition it afforded him.

The second interview with Ki occurred in November 1995; by this time he had found his new position, although as we have seen this was not without its struggle. In March he was appointed to a local council organisation, Halbron, which was not close to the capital city of the State, Melbourne, and arguably not so much under the immediate attention of the State Government, whose 'seat' is in Spring Street in the central Melbourne city area. He spoke of the period of job searching as a 'wilderness period'.

Ki – And that's a period I don't think I want to go through again. And I mean a lot of people have gone through it – the problem is that a lot of people too think that they are the only ones who have gone through it, but it was that period of having a temporary job, but knowing it was only temporary and applying for jobs in other places. And you start to realise the power of the management consultants. Because they're the ones –

Bonna – They're the ones that do the first cut?

Ki – They did one hell of a lot of the recruiting. To begin with you have the first – the advertising, the analysis or whatever, and you quickly realise that they work for the client and not for the applicant and they make the most important decision – who to leave off the list, the list of applicants they take to the clients. So that was a period of lots of applications and lots of 'thank you, but no thank you' letters to go in the Weetie Box (Interview with Ki, November 1995, p. 1).

After 15 applications for CEO positions Ki was appointed into an ongoing position, his applications for other CEO positions having not been successful. In particular he had been excluded from any future at Solmarco; there was to be no continuity of contribution at the level of the 'organisation'. He attributes this to the selectivity, or we could say 'constraints', applied by the city management consultants who were working on the selection process according to the requirements of the State Government.

Ki – Well I've had knockbacks before, but when I've applied for jobs before it's been on my agenda. I've set out to go and get a job, from the security of a job, and when you get a knockback, you say "ok, well bugger that I'll apply for another one" – it doesn't really matter .... I mean the consequences don't matter that much if you lose one like that because you've still got a job. So that was a sobering experience ... if it hadn't been for that [consultant] preparation beforehand – you know at Isengate we put all our management group through a ... outplacement [program] – no they call it now 'career

transition' – rather fascinating words, yes. But that was good preparation, not only in skills but in attitude stuff and so forth.

Bonna – For you as well? You didn't feel that you had that beforehand?

Ki – No. I mean yes sure – well, it was nine years since I had applied for a job .... And the older you get the more difficult it becomes, ageism and so forth notwithstanding. In fact I started talking to people here as soon as I came. Started to talk about the experience, and I said you know this is my experience over the last three months, it's about to be yours – or something like that is about to be yours as you go through the process (Interview with Ki, November 1995, p. 2).

In his new organisation Ki works with the staff in a process where the end of the change period is narrated in a communal sense and the future is talked about at all levels. We saw that according to Gare (1996) persons who emerge through their participation in the processes controlling the world then become active agents in the transformation of structures of power. This is exemplified in the following story part about the launching of the corporate logo for his new City.

Ki – And then of course we launched the logo a week or so ago and that was another step forward really. Where we got everybody [together] .... we bussed them and ... they turned up with a couple of trucks painted up with the new logo. Handouts to everybody in the new logo. And you could see the beginnings of a new identity and people said "what does the [symbol] mean?"

you know, and I said "well the [symbol] means bloody [symbol] and you can do what you like with it".

Bonna – [Laughing]

Ki – But in the long run what the [logo's] gonna mean is the things, good and bad, that people associate with the [council and the organisation]. That's what the logo's gonna mean in the long run.

Bonna – It doesn't have a meaning except the meaning you put into it.

Ki – Yeah, yeah I mean they are just starting to build the meaning of what it's about. It's got nothing to do with the past (Interview with Ki, November, 1995, p. 9).

Here Ki has effected a kind of symbolic closure, but it is one that is still open to the living dynamic at the level of tradition. Even though the design of the logo itself seems to be imposed, and he declares in a manner similar to the State Government that the past is irrelevant, the meaning of the logo, with its graphic symbol, is left open to a process of communal interpretation. We could conclude that the process is open enough for the possibility of shared meaning to be achieved. This activity of making shared meaning also has a quality of openness with regard to membership in the process. It also exemplifies the sideshadowing that Morson (1994) speaks of, whereby several possible futures are narrated as if there is a life of possible futures. But we can appreciate that this is the process not just for the organisation, but also for himself. There is a kind of openness to the future that he narrates, and more importantly to authorship from employees among others.

Ki seems to be comfortable with the seemingly opposite characteristics that his account of himself makes coherent, and the way he makes the account shows that this comfort could be attributed to his high level of competence in narrative-making. For example he talks to the employees about what he wants in the way of process and how his skill as a manager is powerfully developed, but he also makes it clear that he does not have all the answers. He does this in terms of positions at certain levels of the field. For example he engages directly with staff, but he also tries to anticipate how the organisation and staff can continue to be active in relation to the 'religion of Spring Street' and the narrative activity of the State Government. We could conclude that he promotes the activity of reading at the level of employees as persons and as collectives such as the business units.

Ki – One of the things I did right from the start when I came here was – when I was talking with these managers – I said "This is the way we are going for a client-provider split and this is why we're going for a client-provider split" – I'm saying this is not the organisation for every place and every kind. I think in [our organisation] this is the organisation we want and I said "one of the reasons is that it's going to help us through the first three or four years, but the other reason is that it's going to make it easier for us to respond to whatever other changes that Jeff's got in the pipeline down the track". I said "if we establish a clear operations group that is a viable and profitable organisation and Jeff ['Jeff' refers to The Honourable Jeff Kennet MLA, State Premier] comes in and says 'CCT wasn't enough [the process whereby local councils were being forced by the State Government to increase, up to 50 per cent over

a period of three years, the proportion of council work that was to be open to public tender (Victoria. Parliament, 1994, October 19)], I want you to get out of service delivery completely", like he did with [other government entities such as] the water industry and VicRoads, I said "we've got an organisation which is viable, which we can float off or sell off, and do it to the advantage of Council for what it gets for selling it off", and to the people who stay in that organisation and go on with that organisation – you sell off a running – a going – concern. Now, some of the other organisations around the place where they haven't got that vertical split will have great difficulty when Jeff comes in and says "divest yourself of all your services" – great difficulty, because they won't know which parts to divest and the bits they divest will be fragmented and won't be properly lead and chances are they'll go [badly] (Interview with Ki, November 1995, p. 13).

His capacity to leave the narratives open to possibility comes to the fore in contributions like this, but so does his purpose of seeking to influence, through his own authorial strategies, the paths into the future. Again this testifies to his competence as a player of the game in Bourdieu's terms, and when Carr (1986) argues that there are configurations that we follow through in time in spite of their discontinuities, we can appreciate the competence that enables Ki to engage in complex actions that are performed discontinuously as well. We can see how each of these is like a distinguishable story-line constituted by our protentions, retentions, and intentions. For example Ki is responding in an immediate sense to the reforms, but all the while he is involved in what it means to provide a public service and the longer

term unfolding of this argument at the level of the field and his part in it. We could say that this narrative competence supports him as a player of the game at the level of field.

It is in doing this that Ki achieves a narrative grasp that spans not only his own place as a character who is passive according to the State Government, but also a capacity to have authorship in his own life and participate in co-authorship in the lives of others. As we saw above this is the living out of an autobiography as an action that Ki performs (Carr, 1986). It unfolds in time as we can see in his account. This is understandable if we recognise how a manager of Ki's capacity would have to work at making coherent not only the little stories such as those we saw above recounted by Red and Rom in Part 3, but also a whole that is meaningful at the level of the larger activity of organisation and field. We saw for example how Rom regards public service as that which never has to be capable of financial viability, and how Red struggles to be a 'trainee ferret' on the hunt for information that could enable him to act as a public servant and know what his part is following local government reform.

Ki continued, through his own narrative-making efforts, to be a player at the level of the field of government. The authorial strategies he used to 'act back' at this level enabled him to make a constructive response to the ongoing argument in the field. He was not in a powerful enough position to ask those in the State Government to make an account of their actions, but he did work at conserving his own position as a basis for rebuilding his power and the potential he had to act. These strategies included ensuring continued membership in the field, narrating a position that the

future had open possibilities, working in co-authorship with others who were players in the social spaces of organisation and field (not only allies but those positioned on the side of the State Government), holding together in narrative accounts the seemingly discordant nature of events and of his own contribution, actively participating in narrative-making at the level of organisation and the co-creation of narrative identity at all levels. If one were to draw from his contribution a theme for his narrative, it would be, in his own words, "luck favours the prepared" (Interview with Ki, November 1995, p. 14).

It was apparent in the two interviews with Ki that even though his projected story as the ongoing CEO of Isengate was cut short, he had some access to 'time and space' to engage in narrative activity that would reorient his self in a new direction. He was for a short duration a passive character in the narrative about local government reform, but he transcended this. We could say that he had competence, or practical wisdom, that he was able to imagine other possible futures and was able to put in the effort to be an active contributor. But we would also have to conclude that through the authorship strategies of the State Government Ki's projected life narrative was closed as he was forced out of Isengate and the key authorship position that he had there as an ongoing project prior to the merger of Isengate and Anessa to form Solmarco.

In the activity of reading Ki transcends the reduction of his story to a mere sequence (Carr, 1986). He moves to another level of complexity by taking an active stance at the level of field, but also by narrating a new position for himself and



beginning the process of making complexity anew. We can read this in the following story part:

Ki – I think this country's got a lot going for it. One of the things I like is that most Australians can't remember the national anthem! It's a sign that it doesn't – that that part of it doesn't really matter. I think we've got a good track record in managing the diversity in the community, especially the ethnic diversity, I mean compared with some countries, black and white, or Japan for example. We've got a bloody good track record. I mean it's not perfect, and it's not guaranteed that we'll continue. There's no guarantees. There are no guarantees in anything, but either way it's not guaranteed that it's going to go downhill or uphill.

Bonna – It's sort of an existential approach isn't it?

Ki – Up to a point it is, but I think that you can influence the future. I don't have any proof of that, but I think you can influence the future, and you may as well have a go. And you may or may not succeed. But that's better than saying you can't influence the future. At least for me it is, I think.

Bonna – It seems to me that that might have been what you were doing back in February and March when you...

Ki – Mmm. Yeah, I was working bloody hard to get a job.

Bonna – And believing in fact that you could influence that.

Ki – Oh yes, I could influence that. Whether I could influence it enough I didn't know. Yeah. And the interesting thing is the way I got the job –

because although I'd applied for the job, a number of jobs and this was one of them – this was through the same [consulting] organisation that I'd applied for some other jobs, .... I went to one interview with the guy from [the consultant] and he had put me on the list for some earlier jobs and then he started to leave me off the list, okay. So this is what I'm talking about, they make the decisions. And I guess to keep contact with them, because I knew that it was important to keep contact with them, and keep reminding them, and putting myself in front of them, and being of actual use to them at times – and he kept saying to me, "look we've got a lot of applicants for Halbron, and it will be a very strong field, and don't hold your hopes up for that". And the bastard hadn't put me on the list! and I was sitting at [my interim job] one day, working through an organisational structure and a budget and some thoughts on how we might put that together, and I got a phone call from the guy and he said, "are you still interested in Halbron?" and I said, "yes". And he said, "well how quickly can you get in here?" and I said, "well it will take me half an hour to get there and give me another quarter of an hour to pack up and find a carpark". And I said, "tell me why you're asking me?" and he said "well I've been talking with the Commissioners from Halbron and we've interviewed a number of people and we're not happy with any that were on the list and your name's come up. And one of the Commissioners said he knew you ... and he's asked why you're not on the list". So I quickly picked up the scare that I had, looked at the tie I was wearing and thought, "that's not an interview tie, but bugger it, I don't have time to change it" and so headed off

to the city preparing on the way as I was driving down the highway. And what happened was that Mon, who I knew was one of the Commissioners at Halbron, was an ex-councillor at [another council], where I'd had some involvement from time to time ... over the past four or five years, and he had said, "why don't you get Ki in?" So when I got there I thought, well that's good, I've got at least one person who's interested, so I got in to the interview not having done very much preparation, and the question that the Chairman levelled at me, was – (... I got a bit of background on the way in, speaking to the consultant, finding out where each of the Commissioners came from). So [the Chairman] asked me the question when we first began, he said "have you got any questions you want to ask us?" That was his first question. And I thought, "you bastard!" And so my immediate response was, "well yes" – I thought if I don't get this job this morning then I'm never going to get it, so I said, "yes, why am I here?" So that sort of put him on the back foot a bit and he said, "well, Mon said ..." so then I said, "okay, well, a second question is, what sort of person are you looking for? Why do you think I've got the skills that you might ...?" and they started talking about organisation and so I put down the draft organisation I was working on at [my interim post], and said "This is the sort of organisation chart and I think it's important that we have a provider's function and a customer service function". And I could see his eyes light up, and I thought, "good, gotcha" (Interview with Ki, November, 1995, p. 23).

Again in this story part we can read how Ki contributes to the process of opening what was closed; his story positions himself as having this capacity to operate at this level. Following on from the above it is argued that persons can be caught up in a transformed world, and at such a time of narrative transition it can be appreciated that there are forces of action and struggle at work. The account made in response to 'Who am I?', and 'Who am I going to be?', is influenced by these forces.

We would have to conclude that Ki's practical wisdom in reaching for authenticity according to Carr's (1986) definition is sustainable because of his conviction that 'preparation' is important and takes it past the limit of his life as a reduction to the position of passive character in the narrative of local government reform. Living inside a narrative that 'luck favours the prepared' is how Ki presents himself – as an unfinished autobiography, but one that is sustained by narrative competence itself.

We saw above how Ki remarks that "I've said you can go and listen to all the religion that comes out of Spring Street and there's some truth in some of it" (Interview with Ki, January 1995, p. 20). He renders himself intelligible through an enlarged narrative (MacIntyre, 1981), and it is appropriate to consider what this could mean as it leads us back to the activity that the State Government was engaged in at this time of the merger. We have seen above that while this was Ki's description of their position, we have seen how the latter was a position in a tradition of readings. In effect at the level of 'becoming-text' it is the 'religion of Spring Street' that meets Ki's story, 'luck favours the prepared'. For Ki this constraint enables a new turn in the story-line of the emergent autobiography. Life is refigured in order to account for this

constraint. But we would also have to conclude that Ki was enabled to act as he has by virtue of that very tradition that the State Government says no longer exists.

Although only two interviews were achieved with Ki, compared for example with three interviews for Keep and five for Rom, there was a richness of meaning that could be engaged with (Mishler, 1991) and that is reflected in the length of this section. This could have been due to Ki's achievement, seen as an account by a senior manager; he had extensive experience at the management level in local government. Unlike the other employees considered below, he had achieved a level that was rich in its own complexity. His story parts provide a contrast for example to those of Keep, who is accorded less space in this thesis. Because the latter is just starting out on a working life, we could reasonably expect story parts that reflect this. This raises an interesting question in relation to further research. We could ask how people with management capability come to be emergent within the organisation/field relationship. What are the facilitative constraints that enable such people to be emergent and capable of acting to make organisations and fields more autonomous? And in turn how do these higher levels of activity act to provide a refuge that enables people to become capable managers? As Ricoeur (1984) demonstrates, this is not a circle of inquiry that is closed in on itself; rather it is a spiral that is productive.

## **6.2 Rom: "they're not gonna make me redundant"**

Rom graduated with a degree in engineering, and following on from this had been recruited into local government. After a short period in a country council in another Australian state, he successfully applied for a position at Isengate. At the time of the merger he had been at Isengate for nine years. Having started with road and

drainage design, he had gradually moved to a new position using computer and network based Computer Aided Design (CAD) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

Rom – Eventually they gave me a job which basically I had created for myself ... which some people do .... And I've gradually risen up through the seniority ranks as well. ...so now I supervise some staff (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 2).

For Rom local government existed in order to provide services to ratepayers and this was an important emphasis for him because it had grown historically out of what he considered to be the main purpose of local government. We saw above how he describes local councils as land management authorities, which later began providing community services.

He emphasises that the merger came about because of forces at the level of the field. He argues that it was "totally externally driven" (Interview with Rom, January, 1995, p. 30), that the decision was economic in character, and that it was experienced as forceful, rather than being a matter of choice.

Rom - I'm not really sure that the way they've gone about the amalgamation was the right way to do it. They slammed [us] together – and people need time to get used to these sorts of ideas and the previous amalgamation attempt by the Labor government failed because they consulted with people and then people objected to it and so they dropped the whole thing. The Liberal people have said well we don't care if you object, we've got our own economic agenda because it's perceived bigger councils are more cost efficient. Which

is not necessarily true ... I think the amalgamation was a political thing, but the State Government has got economic matters as its first and only priority as far as I can see. And if it makes economic sense they'll do it and if people get run over in the process – tens of thousands of public servants have been made redundant – that's tens of thousands of people who have had their lives turned on their head. See in this amalgamation process almost all the benefits will accrue to the people who pay the council money, they will get a better service ... like lower rates ... but the sacrifices ... will be almost exclusively falling on staff. It will be the staff who lose their jobs, the staff who have all their pet projects overturned or terminated and all that sort of thing (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 4-5).

We saw above how Rom did not believe that a public service could be constrained into being economically viable: "I don't believe that public service could ever be financially viable" (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 21). For example he contrasts the State Government approach to amalgamations in local government with the process of amalgamation that had been implemented for other government organisations. He emphasises how there had been some freedom about choosing amalgamation partners.

Rom – They had lots and lots of tiny water boards ... and so they didn't say "Right, you will amalgamate with X". Because that's what's happened here. People have been told "You will amalgamate" and they might not have been happy about that, they might have preferred to amalgamate with somebody else for instance. And so they did things to the water boards like withdraw

financial support ... basically [the boards] could see the writing on the wall. But they organised their own amalgamations. They said okay well I suppose we'll have to merge with that mob across the river, otherwise we'll never be an entity, you know a worthwhile entity. So, there was force in a different way, but at least they had a lot more control over the process. Whereas here it's been totally externally driven. Isengate did it's damndest to try and influence the outcome and we got the outcome we wanted, but whether that was because that was going to happen anyway I don't know (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 6).

These parts emphasise how Rom is aware of the forces that are emergent at the level of organisation that is Solmarco, forces that we have seen are brought into play by the State Government through their narrative of local government reform. The constraint at this level is on the organisation as the form that is emergent, but through Rom we see the positioning of the existing local government employees as passive characters in this process of organisational merger. Even though an employee can retain membership in the narrative-making space, there are further constraints in operation. At this early stage of January, Rom's position in the duration of the process is more passive than it was prior to the merger, as he has few powers of authorship. We shall see below that he had over the nine years established a position of recognition, but this is reduced because those senior managers who provided recognition themselves lose their positions.

Even though Rom was not at the senior management level in Isengate, he regarded himself as having "reasonably good channels into the management around



here" (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 8). Both because of the projects he was given and because he was a committed union organiser (a Shop Steward), he had been an active contributor, along with management, to the conditions that established his position in the organisation. For example he was a member of the Isengate Consultative Committee, that had operated under Ki's management.

Rom – Under the Local Government Award there has to be a Consultative Committee, which is made up of union and management reps to oversee various staff issues and ours has worked really well. It hasn't been a negotiating committee at all. It's basically been another committee where things get worked out and if you attended that meeting you wouldn't be able to say "oh they are the management people and they're the union people". You'd be flat out telling who was who (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 8).

Rom had also been involved in a major project to reorganise council offices. In the practice of being a public servant, he had gained an established position through the community of action that had been Isengate. In other words it was not only his engagement at the level of tradition but also his engagement at the level of practice that would enable him to carry his story past the constraint, even though the activity of providing a public service was being subjected to the claims of the State Government that would open up the public service to different kinds of competition construed as 'the market'.

Rom – I was the person who had to co-ordinate all of that and I had to make sure that every time there was a move, that everybody and all their equipment

all arrived at the new location simultaneously. And so because of that I got to know just about every person in the building and had a lot to do with senior management because they always wanted to know what was going on, so I sort of knew these people (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 9).

Because of this, when interviewed in January, Rom expressed a positive, but determined, disposition towards the merger:

Rom – Well, there's a fair number of people around here are saying – and I'm one of them – "I'm gonna be here at the end". When it's all said and done they're not gonna make me redundant (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 16).

He considered himself to be a committed public servant. He expresses concern over work being contracted out to those he regards as not having this commitment:

Rom – And it's the quality of the things ... the people are pretty suspicious of private contractors, particularly in the engineering area, because they've seen contractors pull swifties all the time. If they can cut corners they will. And so people are highly suspicious. It comes back to this service nature that people have. They're here to do a job, they do a good job. And they don't want to see a bit of work taken over by a contractor who'll then just build it for its profits. Because when you're under financial pressure that's the sort of thing that happens (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 22).

When Rom makes his account there is both his desire to be a good public servant and his desire to retain a job with reasonable benefits. Hence it is apparent

that the whole can make sense of how he both makes a contribution and has an interest in the game and his position in the field. He is able to make this intelligible in relation to the ongoing argument at the level of the field, and he contrasts this to those he regards as not pursuing the same 'goods':

Rom – If you've got a whole lot of contractors they don't have any loyalty to the organisation whatsoever. But then there are people here [at Isengate] who have no loyalty to the organisation either, but they are fairly few in number. Most people – if the extra effort is required – will put in the extra effort (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 25).

Rom – If you take a redundancy package you blow a lot of long term stuff. Like ... I'm 36, if I took a redundancy package now, and took all my super and all my entitlements basically I'd get another job and have to start all over again. I'd start accruing superannuation all over again, I'd start accruing long service leave all over again, so I've got six months to go until I'm eligible for long service leave and I've naturally got both eyes on that target so there's no way known I want to go. I don't know whether people think about these sorts of things. If you quit a career half way through your working life, at the end of your working life you haven't got an entire career's benefits accruing to you. You've only got however long you're working - now whether that's the way people think ... I suppose a lot of people have never had a superannuation scheme so they've never really had a long term view of things ... that's why public servants stayed in the one job their entire lives 'cause they knew that their super was just accumulating and accumulating, and

accumulating. At the end of their working life they'd have either the lump sum or pension to be going on with (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 17).

Rom – I joined local government for two reasons - one was that I don't like working for a private company where all my efforts are going into providing profits for the shareholders, but prefer to work for a government instrumentality which is providing benefits to the community and also a lot of job security. A local government position tends to be a lot more stable than the private sector where you are at the whim of the economy and if business goes bad then the company goes bust. Then through no fault of own you're out of a job. And so people join the public service because of those sorts of ideals and then to have someone come along and turn [something like] the State Electricity Commission into a number of little companies – which is what basically they're doing – the primary aim is not to supply electricity and to do it well but to do it for profit ... And that sort of mentality translates into here (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 20).

As well as the losing of recognition in the narrative-making space, Rom is also active in relation to the constraints that relate to time. We can see above his concern that he is at a particular time of his life and that what is happening is not a welcome intervention in regard to 'time of a life'. Time is for Rom a kind of resource, and there is only so much available. There is less of a sense that there are temporal dynamics that could enable him to move to another level of operation. He seems to expect a smooth trajectory upwards according to timing that is matched to his, but this becomes another constraint as his projected future is now more difficult to narrate

according to his former account of his position. The unfolding at the level of activity that is 'the organisation' is changing the timing that would have been expected if the merger had not occurred or had occurred more slowly, as he saw in other kinds of amalgamations, for example the water boards. He must now account for this. The organisation of Solmarco is 'becoming' too, and this is a source of constraint that may or may not be to his advantage.

Nevertheless Rom is keen to secure a promotion because of the organisation transformation. He speaks of how this will be an opportunity and he is optimistic, as well as ambitious to be part of the game, during this early period when there is an interim CEO at the head of Solmarco.

Rom – It's gonna be a long drawn out process. I see myself as certainly being an applicant for a manager position, which is one step above me. I feel that I am a perfectly reasonable applicant for one of those. I reckon I could do a Director job actually, but I'm not gonna be an applicant for that because I don't think anyone would take it seriously .... I'm fairly determined I'll be in the organisation in one form or another. But I've got a couple of strings to me bow because I can apply for engineering positions and computer positions .... Generally I feel that the amalgamation is something that has been forced on people too quickly but it's happened. Here we are and basically you've got to make the best of it. And the people who are even half enthusiastic about it are going to come out on top .... I see in some ways the amalgamation is an opportunity to achieve things. When you try and merge two completely separate organisations it sometimes is an opportunity to do a quantum leap

technologically and that sort of thing ... particularly where the two organisations have got different ways of doing things, instead of adopting one or the other's way, they work to adopt a new way. So instead of spending money on making one the same as the other let's make both a new thing altogether. So you can use this sort of thing as an opportunity to improve things if you go about it the right way, so I'm hoping that a bit of that will occur as well (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 29).

Rom – I care about the organisation – I feel that local government is a place that is worth preserving – and I suppose that spurs me on a bit (Interview with Rom, March 1995, p. 11).

This contribution suggests that Rom may have a feel for the game. For example he sees himself as being better off than other employees because there is more than one kind of position that he can apply for. He is able to narrate other possible futures for himself. He also accepts that there have been changes, and is able to envisage that there could be possible advantages for the future of Solmarco because of these changes. He suggests that a 'new way' could emerge for the operation at this level of activity, and that it is important to be enthusiastic this. He also brings these hopes together with his determination to be a player.

The level 3 positions at the new Solmarco, where Rom now works as it has by now absorbed Isengate, were advertised in May 1995 and Rom applies on the basis that this would be a promotion, but he is unsuccessful. While he estimates that two hundred employees have lost their jobs or left since the process began, and that this was out of approximately nine hundred counting the employees of Isengate and

Anessa together, at this point he remains optimistic about his chances. But by July he is reporting that the new organisation structure has an additional level inserted between what was his old level and what is now the new management.

Rom – So it just seems to be sticking in an extra level between me and the top for no particular reason. So I'm not going to be a serious applicant for my own [level five] position because it's pushed me a level down in the structure. I was looking for more management responsibility not less. And so I'm an applicant for level four positions and so I'm going to be an applicant for the position that supervises what I'm currently doing (Interview with Rom, July 1995, p. 4).

Rom – ...well up until now I've been basically entirely confident that somewhere in the organisation there will be a position that I would want to keep .... but now I don't – well I'm not really interested in keeping [my own position] and if I miss out on all these level fours then I'll just fall back to this level five position and start looking for something else somewhere else. I was looking for this whole process as a chance to get up the structure a bit. And if I find myself back in exactly the same job as I've got now [and] my duties won't have changed but my distance from senior management will have changed by one level, and I'll also have missed out on the opportunity for a promotion for quite a while because I'm at the top of [my promotional band], .... so it's now beginning to look seriously like I [may miss out] – well I'd say I've still got a more than fifty percent chance of picking up one of the [higher

level] positions, but still no where near as cut and dried as I once thought it could have been (Interview with Rom, July 1995, p. 9).

Rom – And if the organisation thinks, with the opportunity presented to it that I'm still not worth the money up the ladder, well then blow it basically. I've seen enough people who are ten, fifteen years older than I am who are still the same level as I am – will never be general managers or anything like that – and I've decided a long time ago I didn't want to do that. Some people were just quite content to just reach middle level of engineering – sort of highest 'hands on' role if you like and just stay there. And I'm not interested in doing that and if they gave me a level five position that's basically what that would be (Interview with Rom, July 1995, p. 12).

At this point in the emergent organisation Rom decides to close down any activity on his part that involves what he regards as extra commitments, seen as participation on committees and union involvement. "Basically stop putting myself out for the organisation as much and sort of pull back to the position itself" (Interview with Rom, July 1995, p. 14).

He laments the loss of the close relationship that had been established between him and those in more senior management positions; most of the managers he worked with in Isengate are no longer employed at Solmarco.

Rom – You see when one person like that leaves and another person takes their place, it takes a long time to ever re-establish that sort of relationship. And when that happens again and again and again then you sort of find that



entire sections of the organisation are suddenly cut off from you because you don't know the people who are there (Interview with Rom, July 1995, p. 17).

In September we can see the extent of the transformation in Rom's account of himself:

Rom – I was extremely confident of getting one of the level four positions and I didn't get any of them .... So I've decided that – well I'm not eligible to take a redundancy package, because my position still exists and I've been offered it as well. It's not as if someone else has tipped me out of it. So I'll be using the position as an interim thing while I look for something else. Which is not really what I had in mind, but that's what's happened (Interview with Rom, September 1995, p. 1-2).

Rom – I sort of felt I was putting in all that stuff partly for my own benefit and partly for the organisation's benefit and at the moment I'm feeling well if the organisation doesn't want that benefit well then blow them (Interview with Rom, September 1995, p. 8).

As we saw in Part 4 above Ricoeur (1984) emphasises that the circle, or more properly spiral, of narrative making is endless in the sense that we carry the mediation past the same point a number of times but at different altitudes, and that we do this through the activity of reading. For Rom this activity continues, but he progressively becomes distanced from the emergent organisation. Any symbolic capital he had in the form of recognition is dissipated, but there are also not yet any facilitative constraints that could enable his activity at the level of organisation. In Isengate he did have these kinds of constraints perhaps, but Solmarco is overly constrained as we

saw in Part 5. While new managers may be appointed who act to change this, the dynamics at the level of 'the organisation' may be slow to emerge in this regard. What he achieves in these months is a closure in response to the activity of the State Government, and unlike Ki he is not yet competent to take this to another level. He perhaps will not gain this until a space of recognition is re-established according to the kind of cultural dynamics and the dialectics of recognition we saw above under the theory of Honneth (1996). We have seen that he appreciates that this is a longer-term project for someone at his level, and that his competence is integral with this activity that he has engaged in. A longer-term prospect could be the achievement of new recognition, but this is a setback to his purpose of gaining a management position in his thirties, rather than staying, as he says some do, at the 'hands-on' level of public service practice.

We could conclude from the above that over this period of months the time of the organisation and the time of Rom's life become incoherent with respect to the whole. We could also conclude that he has lost recognition at the level of organisation that is 'the organisation', but furthermore that he has no recognition that would enable him to take the mediation to the level of activity that is the field. These are the conditions that the State Government has influenced when they set out to ensure that certain collective agents, such as the former CEOs, were marginalised with respect to agency in the narrative activity in the new Solmarco. In Rom's story both the loss of senior management and the loss of the collective power of the union are there to be overcome, but by his own account time will be needed to ensure this process is ongoing.

According to Schelling (1800/1978) that which is positive in what is achieved tends to be construed as a product of the self, and what is negative tends to be construed as 'not self'. For Rom the challenge presented by the State Government activity could be to his own level of narrative competence. In order to continue to participate in the ongoing argument he must move to a new level. The vehemence expressed in Rom's assertion, "When it's all said and done they're not gonna make me redundant" (Interview with Rom, January 1995, p. 16), alerts us to the challenge Rom faces. This position could perhaps be more appropriate to membership in narrative making at the level of collectives, for example the unions, than it is at the level of person. This is because the position taken creates a distance that may not be traversable, and then closure is effected at the level of 'person'. Unlike Ki's story, at this time Rom's seems to close at the level of product and does not adequately account for further activity, or openness, in response to the constraints involved in being a passive character in the narrative of local government reform.

But from the perspective of the whole, as a community of action, we would have to question whether the activity of the State Government is healthy in regard to Rom's story. Again, as with Ki, a projected life is cut short. Over a period of months Rom comes to be in a position that prevents the continuation of the co-creative activity he was engaged in. There was co-creativity that enabled him to act because the relationship of organisation and employee was 'alive' or 'vibrant' (MacIntyre, 1981). This activity, where he could exercise authorship in his process of becoming and that of the organisation, but also be an active character according to the truth claims in the tradition, is no longer ongoing because there has been a major setback.

Those conditions that would enable him to refigure in a co-creative way, are themselves constrained.

### **6.3 Keep: " I don't think the solution is that far away"**

Keep had been at Isengate for two years. He was not long out of school when employed as a local government trainee, then he worked briefly in several departments, but at the time the interviews were begun for this thesis he had settled into the Human Resources Department in a clerical position.

Earlier it was argued that according to Bourdieu if one is interested then it is not possible to be a disinterested player (Bourdieu, 1998b), hence to be interested in the stakes is to accord a given social game and its particular social stakes a status, that is, that the ongoing argument is worth pursuing and does matter (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). We could say from the above story parts that both Ki and Rom still had a disposition to play the game, even though both were constrained, for example in regard to their membership in the narrative-making space and time of Solmarco. For Keep we may consider that his response to the ongoing argument over what constitutes a public service show that he is potentially 'disinterested'; that is, he does not feel a commitment that would enable him maintain membership in the narrative-making spaces of the organisation and field.

Keep, as a young person who has limited experience, is aware of how he is being positioned, but is also optimistic. There is some agreement with the position taken by the State Government, but again an interest in the opportunities that could

open up beyond this constraint. Like Ki, who was Keep's CEO at Isengate, there is a sense of being prepared for what is coming:

Keep – You know well it was going to happen – it didn't matter how much people protested – they can maybe change boundaries and things but the fact was that the amalgamation was going to happen ... people have put more of their energy into being prepared for these changes because they've seen what's happened in other places. For example [at another council] – just down the roadish ... everyone went into that with a bit of trepidation and didn't prepare themselves very well and it was an absolute shemozzle. And I think [here at Solmarco] it was "maybe if we do a little more prep work we won't end up in such a bad state somewhere down the line" ... if we think positively and keep going with this you know it might be what happens [is] okay (Interview with Keep, January 1995, p. 2-3).

Unlike the older informants, Keep's narrative grasp emphasises a long future as an employee; he positions himself as being at a beginning of the autobiography, especially with regard to employment. He therefore reads into these dynamics other positions that do not seem similar to his:

Keep – ... And one of the other members of the [human resources] team .... She's said over the last few months she's had a lot more people come to her and say oh I'm a bit stressed about this, and [she's] older and a lot of the people who have been here for a long time in the organisation feel quite strange about these changes. You know maybe if you haven't been here for so long and you might have done other jobs and you may not think this is the end

of the earth sort of thing. But some people feel "what happens after this?" – "what happens if I don't get another job?" or whatever and it's difficult to reassure people in those situations – I especially find because I don't understand their viewpoint. I mean for me I would say "Oh I'll just get another job" (Interview with Keep, January 1995, p. 8).

Bonna – Okay. So you're not finding this at all stressful in any way?

Keep – I think there's no point getting stressed – it's gonna happen whether I'm stressed or not. Hopefully I'll just be able to work you know as easily as I can. There's the other thing – if I get retrenched – well that's happened – nothing I can do about it. I'll just do the best job I can. And then hopefully it'll all turn out to my favour (Interview with Keep, January 1995, p. 13).

By the time of the March interview it transpires that Keep has been successful within his department in applying for another position, one of personal assistant (secretary) to the manager whom he respects.

Bonna – So where do you see your future in all of this?

Keep – I have no idea.

Bonna – Okay – so you are not hunting for something else?

Keep – No – I was and then I got the secretary position so I was happy with that. I will stick with that and see what the management position brings about and take it from there (Interview with Keep, March 1995, p. 45).

This story part refers to the management changes being undertaken at Solmarco and how these could effect the leadership of his department. Keep worked

in Human Resources (HR). Under Ki, at Isengate, human resources had been recognised as an important department and elevated into a close relationship with the CEO through a direct reporting arrangement in the organisation hierarchy. Under Tem, at Solmarco, this changed as part of the transformation:

Keep – Tem has done an organisational structure – we're not very impressed with it, but we'll live with it. For starters I mentioned before that Human Resources is not part of senior management – well it is during the interim period, but thereafter it will be gone so while everything's being decided Human Resources will probably – may go first – I don't know, I mightn't have a job. Somebody else may apply for it and they might get it next time. I'm not thinking about that. So they're envisaging the Human Resources department will be decided and then we can hire everybody else down the line sort of thing. But once our usefulness in that regard has been exhausted we'll be going down under one of the Group Managers ... so we'll be shifted sideways there (Interview with Keep, March 1995, p. 58).

As part of this Keep loses not just the Manager of Human Resources, whom he admires but who fails to gain one of the new management positions, but also the prospect of working for a department that is well positioned to influence senior management. The loss of symbolic recognition which Keep experiences is related to membership in a particular department; his recognition in the organisation is understood by him as being associated with recognition at the level of collective rather than personal agency.

Keep begins applying for positions outside local government, but acknowledges that changes are occurring across the field of government. Again we see the transformation described in relation to the constraints of the narrative of local government reform, in particular the forces that give prominence to economic management and the capacity to continue to provide public services in line with cuts in spending.

Keep – I've got an interview tomorrow for a job with Eastern Energy. So, [my manager] said to me 'you just can't get enough of this change process can you?' ... I also applied for a job at the Australian Wheat Board and they were looking at privatisation within twelve months as well. I mean there's just, you know, everywhere is changing and re-establishing and ... I was reading an article about it. It's like 'do managers have a really clear focus of where this change is leading them?' Like the buzz words are 'change management' and 'living with change' and 'changing organisations' but it's like are we changing for the sake of change or are we changing to achieve something? And I think that's also a bit of the way it feels here. It's like ok we're all changing, but what are we heading for? ... one way that managers have been empowered here [is in] setting their team .... but there's been no direction as to what orientation we want to be heading towards. And you know we want to be 'best practice', we want to be like this, we want to be like that, but when people have actually been doing the physical work of setting up teams and that is one of the critical times ... there's been no direction about what they should be achieving [or] going to achieve in that process. Except that they



should be trying to save money ... Which I don't think is the best directive ... to give an example, in our town planning area the manager who has been doing it has tried everything. He had such different teams. The one at Anessa was very much a traditional local government town planning department. And the one here at Isengate was customer focused. Warm and fuzzy type, you know. "This is our structure". "No, I don't like that." This, you know, "no". He consulted, he did everything and he just got a 'but' through it all [from employees]. You know, like "he's trying to take away our jobs". "He's trying to get rid of our focus." ... the poor man just couldn't win. So in the end he said alright, *this is this*. "We'll go under a review process and ... work out what we want to do". So that was his solution. I think it was a good solution to the problem. But what you're getting there is the pull again. It's like he's trying to make everybody happy but at the same time the Commissioners are sitting on his tail saying "got too many staff in that area, cut – cut your budget". Cut, cut, and it's like "how do I keep my customer service focus and how do I keep this and still cut money at the same time?" It's very difficult I think for him ... to achieve that goal (Interview with Keep, August 1995, p. 82).

We see in this contribution the ongoing struggle for those who value the kind of public service that has been possible in the past and what is being asked by the State Government and Tem (the new CEO of Solmarco). We saw above how employees are being asked to maintain service levels even though the economic capital will be reduced, and we can see that Keep's story parts attest to the struggle

that employees could have in passive acceptance of this position. Employees are informed as we have seen by a tradition of readings and it is in this tradition that they become competent readers. Even though Keep has not been long in the tradition, he has been influenced by Ki and the manager whom he respects, and this affords recognition of Keep as a person with some goods or values about public services that are to be pursued.

Keep continues to be optimistic about the future story of Solmarco, but as part of this begins to envisage a new future for himself, one which does not include membership in the narrative-making space of Solmarco. As we saw with Rom, the desired future is now constrained; the promotion to a more challenging job does not come about because of the merger.

Bonna – At the beginning of the year when I talked to you, you were really positive ... and you obviously still feel very positive about your own future but you don't see it as happening here.

Keep – No. I feel positive about the way a lot of things have been achieved here ... but I just don't see me being here because as I said earlier the position I applied for I missed out on. I really think I'm ready to go the next step in my career. That's a personal thing as well. And I don't think Solmarco can offer that to me at this time. So quite apart from the amalgamation or whatever, I might have reached this step anyway (Interview with Keep, August 1995, p. 92).

As we see Keep has some capacity to narrate a future himself, but we also see how he struggles to identify with others around him. With regard to older employees

who have worked in local government a long time, we can see in this story part how Keep positions himself.

Keep – I think they're just looking at the problem and not looking at the solution. And I don't think the solution is that far away. And I think they need to focus on that solution then it maybe won't seem quite so bad ... I think most people take it pretty well, but I can understand why they're not, but I think it will come together. I don't think it's gonna be as bad as they thought.

Bonna – Do you think there's any age difference here? Your perspective is a little bit different to the older –?

Keep – Oh absolutely. The person I was telling you about before has quite a lot of older people in the organisation who she's consoling at the moment because they feel quite stressed because they've been in the same job for a while and I said to her I can't understand that fellow and I don't feel badly toward them, but I can't understand it, because they get a package and nice payout from super and maybe that's not what they want, but you know I think something will come up. She said you don't understand their perspective – it's different. She's right it's completely different and I can't understand their perspective and I can see where they're coming from but I can't relate it to me. Yeah so it's very different. I mean I plan to go back to uni part-time next year and if things all fall in a heap then maybe I'll go back full-time or – There's lot's of different ways things can go and I'm not really too stressed out about whichever way I do go.... I don't intend this job to be much up until

retirement. Don't imagine I will be at the City of Solmarco in ten years – I just don't envisage that at all.

Bonna – You don't feel you're settled in here.

Keep – The employment culture has changed a lot because in the past – especially in local government – you'd get a good job and you'd stay there for forty years. And there was absolutely nothing wrong with that, but it ain't the way it is now... if you look at our turnover last year ... we had a lot of recruiting ... and a lot of comings and goings and moving on to other jobs and interstate and things. Fairly healthy turnover I would say .... [T]he sort of people we had leaving were not necessarily people who had been there for twenty years – they were more people who had been there for a year and a half to two years and were ready to move on (Interview with Keep, January 1995, p. 24).

Here we see Keep narrating several possible personal futures and several possible memberships; there is openness of possibility even though he is positioned in Solmarco as being constrained in regard to recognition in the narrative-making space and time of the new organisation. The conditions for transformation appear to be favourable because of a personal time of life and trajectory that are favourable. But we would have to conclude that a projected life is cut short, and that the community of action could be less healthy because of this. Rather than establish facilitative constraints that could enable an employee like Keep to stay and build a career, preference is possibly given in the space for others who have come in from outside Solmarco or even outside local government. The employment market itself has been

opened up through the actions of the State Government; the market as we saw has to be free and unconstrained. Keep positions himself to take advantage of this larger living narrative, and anticipates the kind of transformation that an active character could make through it.

Again we could say that this person does not remain in a passive position, but we would have to also conclude that there are constraints that limit access to time and space as capital that would enable a new personal story to be emergent. For example Keep contributes story parts that are questioning of management and leadership. This indicates an emerging interest in the process itself, and possibly a capacity to make a future contribution, but also a position frustrated from this exploration.

Keep – I mean we've got all these buzz words like Tem wants us to be a 'best practice' organisation by the year 2000, but he hasn't explained to us what that means ... we're going to be a learning organisation. Great! What does that mean? ... I mean looked at from the point of view of Depot [outdoor as opposed to indoor] staff – what does it mean to them? That doesn't inspire them to any loyalty towards Solmarco. That's why it's all very well to have buzz words and 'we are going to achieve these' but I just don't feel it's coming together (Interview with Keep, August 1995, p. 17).

This also shows how the new CEO, Tem, is involved in refiguration at the level of the organisation/field relationship. New language is being used in the argument over public services, and employees are expected to operate according to language that for Keep is foreign, in the sense that we saw Ricoeur (1984) describe a text as being foreign. Shared meaning events are likely to be possible achievements in

the life of Solmarco, but under the new management language is being used in a manner that will influence these achievements. Linguistic competence will have to be gained on the part of employees to enable these achievements to be made. But at this time of merger Keep is constrained from the activity of sharing, because this competence is still emergent.

This is emphasised too in the contrasts that Keep makes between Isengate and Solmarco:

Keep – It has altered. It's a little bit difficult to say at the moment where it's heading or that sort of thing. The whole ship here is a different ship. Tem runs it completely different to how Ki used to run it at Isengate. It's just a very different set of rules. So in that way it makes it a little bit difficult to draw parallels "this is where we were and this is where we are sort of thing" (Interview with Keep, August 1995, p. 10).

Bonna – ... you said that it's quite a different ship and it's going in a different direction. Can you tell me about that?

Keep – Without being derogatory?

Bonna – You can be derogatory if you like.

Kelly – My Dad actually made a comment once about what he felt a senior manager or a CEO, or whatever, should be, and he felt that that person should be running the ship, as in making directions without yelling and stamping and screaming. So it should all just happen. And after he said that I thought about it more, about how Ki did things and that's how it happened. Like he'd have

group management meetings and they'd make decisions. He'd get them to pass that on to their managers and it all just happened. And nobody would kick and scream and fuss. It used to just all flow through beautifully and I suppose what I am saying at the moment is that the Tem factor ... like somebody gave me a job to do and I had almost finished and I had one manager yelling at me to get it done yesterday and it's like "alright, I'm getting it done. I'm almost finished". Another manager came and picked it up and said "Oh, that's not what we want at all". And oh boy, [I'm] like "that's fine you take it, I don't want it. Really I'm fine". Yeah, that's the sort of thing I think has now taken two months to organise and we still don't have it done. It's like this is not good management, somebody is either taking responsibility where they shouldn't be or isn't taking responsibility where they should be or – I mean it's a new team which makes it really hard – Tem is asking somebody to do this and somebody to do that and somebody else to do it as well, it all just comes in a big blur at the end and nobody ends up doing it properly (Interview with Keep, August 1995, p. 10).

Even though Tem has been appointed, Keep is yet to have a sense that a reliable narrator could be present within the organisation. Keep is constrained to being a passive character in regard to the emergent Solmarco, but laments the inability to meet the demands to perform. Keep expresses this as a loss of power; there is no position within the organisation that would enable him to engage in reauthorship that would take him beyond this passivity. He contrasts this with Isengate, where he was enabled to act. The coherence that was present in the

management of Isengate is yet to emerge for Solmarco, even though we have seen a version of economic rationalism has been imposed. The proposed world in front of the text for Keep is one of disorganisation, perhaps because a coherent response is yet to be formed to the questions posed by economic rationalism. Once formed, this response may enable the management at Solmarco to put in facilitative constraints that would assist operational level employees, but at the time of the last interview Keep is seeking another social space in which to establish a position of authorship. It is this activity on his part that could take him to new levels of achievement in regard to presenting himself as an unfinished autobiography. In the process of becoming a move is being made, but whether this will take Keep to a higher level of operation is unclear. It seems likely that it will not occur at Solmarco, as new management has failed to convince Keep that it is worthwhile to stay. Facilitative constraints are not yet in place that would enable this ongoing commitment to be made. When Keep says "I just don't click very well with the way that it's going along" (Interview with Keep, August 1995, p. 2), we can see that the merger is an action unfolding in time as Carr (1986) emphasises. While Keep has time, construed as time of a life, there is no preparedness to be caught up unless some possibilities are forthcoming:

Keep – I feel at the moment that I am more of a secretary than a HR person. And I've never felt that before. I felt that I was very much contributing to the HR team, so it's like "this isn't what I'm used to at all". I feel like I've taken two steps backward. I've spoken to my supervisor about it and she is understanding, and she said also perhaps you have just grown out of the role. The role has taken a few steps back but you keep stepping forward as well. It's



just that the gap is getting wider. And so I did apply for an internal position, because we've had a wonderful spill process going on here at the moment, where all jobs have been open and I actually got my job back and I did apply for another one and I was very close but the person who had more experience in it got it ... But that has been probably more where I was wanting to head. So now that I know that the HR team here is pretty much finalised I'm looking pretty seriously outside. As they decided, I'm taking my time over it. But don't expect me to be here for long. The duties have just changed and everything and it's probably just time to move on I think (Interview with Keep, August 1995, p.2).

In regard to an unfinished autobiography Keep is constrained to be an employee who is not challenged enough within an organisation that is itself under constraints. But Keep is nevertheless able to imagine a other possible futures because there are facilitative constraints in the storyline of economic rationalism and there is a time of life that is favourable. In other words Keep may be able to position himself in the game, because of the way that public service is being defined. Although Keep started out as a local government trainee under a Commonwealth Government scheme that enables young people to obtain their first job, the narrative activity at the level of the field of government can be read by him in such a way that a career in other fields may be opened up. This is the case even though the kind of commitment to public service that he experienced under Ki may no longer be possible. Perhaps through refiguration he will continue the 'customer service focus' that he values, and that we saw was valued under Ki, but the organisation and field will not be the beneficiaries of this.

#### **6.4 Red: "this will be good for me"**

Red was employed at Anessa prior to the merger. At the time of the interviews he had worked his way up from two simultaneous part-time community services positions, and was aspiring to a higher level middle management position.

Bonna – So can you tell me about the amalgamation? What's been happening?

Red – Well ... being new in local government, I come with some freshness. I haven't been entrenched in a bureaucratic way of doing things for many years. And people at Anessa – the sort of culture that was here prior to our current change, was a very benign, what I would say benign paternal, but authoritarian, patriarchal, kind of organisation. The town clerk, who then became a CEO when they had to move to a more corporate structure, he had been here for heavens only knows, more than twenty years ... he'd been as I say, a father figure, I think, to the organisation. But very much obviously a man of the past, with the way Kennett [Premier, State Government] wanted to run local government, and he found it very difficult to cope with the demands for local government to be now a more commercial type economic rationalist type of organisation. I say 'patriarchal' because there had only been one woman director, and that was the woman who was director of community services, which wouldn't surprise you, being a largely female employed area. Prior to her appointment .... I don't think the culture had been very accountable at all.

Bonna – When you say patriarchal and paternalistic, what do you mean by that? Can you give me an example?

Red – I think it was very hierarchical ... change certainly did not come from one layer. It was imposed from above. And even if one layer was saying, "look, we could do things differently here, how about this, that and the other," it could easily be knocked on the head and not supported .... our female director ... used to talk about the boys club, and she found it very difficult to penetrate into that environment at times (Interview with Red, February, 1995, p. 5).

We can read in Red's accounting another side of the Anessa story, but it is one from inside and it comes from an employee. In the following, the marriage metaphor that we saw above in the literature on mergers, is being used by this employee, but of note is the judgement that one partner is passive. This passivity on the part of Anessa is recounted as a characteristic at the level of 'the organisation', but also as part of the dynamics in the relationship of organisation to field.

Red – So we came from that sort of environment into imposed change from the current government. Many people of course don't agree with the changes. I don't see a major problem with amalgamation. I can actually see that it is a good thing, particularly with Anessa and Isengate. I think they were reasonably good partners ... [however] Isengate left Anessa with a view that Anessa was a bit conservative for them .... Isengate was seen as not very good in terms of financial management – apparently they'd run into some strife – they were much more entrepreneurial than Anessa. Perhaps more

inclined to take some risks and do things differently. Their CEO, Ki, from my impression was certainly more adventurous than what we had here. And certainly more on about moving the organisation into more of a corporate way of being. And yeah more entrepreneurial. However Anessa would say that they've been very stable managers. They make a lot of money ... and they've got huge reserves ... that was why Isengate certainly wanted Anessa. And the metaphor of the time was that of a marriage partner, and I saw Anessa's dowry as being these reserves. They made it a very attractive marriage partner. And as I'm saying that, I'm aware that Isengate represents for me the maleness, and they say that we would have had the dowry – we would have been more the passive partner, and Isengate the aggressive – anyway, it seemed then, that Anessa and Isengate was a partnership that was the go-er (Interview with Red, February, 1995, p. 7).

This employee has a broad grasp that enables him to situate the tensions between the two organisations in relation to the larger dynamics that we have seen discussed above. (Note that he also has greater awareness of narrative ideas, partly through some recent studies in management).

Red – All last year was spent on a lot of speculation about what would happen. I started cutting things out of the local paper to get a feel of what the written narrative was about the amalgamation, and there's metaphors very much of marriage, and of it being a shotgun wedding, with Anessa being an unwilling partner. And then there were these incredible reported pieces from the mayors of [each City] carrying on the antagonism. And Isengate putting

ads in the paper indicating how much better off financially the residents would be if there was a Anessa/Isengate alliance. So Isengate was really going for it, and promoting it. And so in the end that's what happened, but I think [because of] the political pressure from Jeff Kennett [at the State level] towards the local government –

Bonna – So people here see that as a political decision?

Red – Yeah, but in their heart of hearts, I think they actually knew that that would be the outcome ... emotionally a lot of people were drawn toward the other option [of joining Nemiston] .... I think there was probably a general feeling of, "well, we're safe. We're going with Nemiston, and that's a good option for us." And then of course the tables got turned and we were back in the race again, and the stakes got higher and higher. And then when the final announcement came out, that it would be Anessa and Isengate, we then got a split-off group [of ratepayers] ... led by a former councillor (Interview with Red, February, 1995, p. 8).

Red – The general attitude within the organisation, was that there was going to be an Isengate takeover, that Isengate would be the dominant culture. And that echoed alarm bells in my mind, of my previous experience, where I'd been in that situation of being in the minority side ... what we've identified as the 'goodies' (laughter).

Bonna – What, the goodies and baddies?

Red – Very much of the ... goodies and baddies .... Well, it [the previous relationship of Anessa and Isengate] lives in the minds of people, see. It's part of the mythology. Yeah, it's definitely part of the mythology and there'll be stories about it ... and because of the study that I did, the organisation behaviour course, I could look at it at one level and distance myself from it. But at another level find myself being caught up in it as well. And then reflect back on it and say, "oh, well here's where the past mythology is rearing its head here very strongly." But yeah, that is part of the organisation, those memories, those stories are part of the way the organisation lives and breathes (Interview with Red, February, 1995, p. 9).

Red – And then what happened was ... [Premier Jeff] Kennett vetoed the local government [appointment processes], and the office of local government appointed the interim Commissioners, and then the CEOs. I find it useful to even just look at how those appointments were made. It wasn't as if people were called for interview. People were selected and then put into positions. So our current CEO was put out of his position. He wasn't offered anything anywhere else. I wouldn't expect that he would have been. [And then] more Isengate people got the [interim] spots than Anessa ... without sort of calling for interviews and it didn't seem to me that there was a proper process. So of course, what did those people do? The directors then modelled the same thing, and we saw people being basically tapped on the shoulder and allocated into positions in the new [temporary] structure. Now that caused a huge amount of dissension, because people who had previously been in management positions

or supervisory positions in Anessa now found themselves in lesser positions, reporting to people from Isengate, who often hadn't had as much experience as they had .... now I'm a union shop steward, and it became very clear that we needed to have a selection procedure here that was fair and transparent, and that enabled people to appeal if they felt that they'd been unfairly done by. So we had to draw attention to the distress that this was causing, the division and conflict that this method of appointment was causing in the [new] organisation. Through a consultative committee that the interim CEO initiated, we attempted to devise procedure. I must admit, I felt quite angry with the human resource people, there were two of them – one from Anessa and one from Isengate – because the union had served them the claim, and in that claim had been a changed management strategy that had in fact laid out a process for fair selection procedures. And of course they hadn't acted on it. Now rumour has it that the interim CEO had abolished his human resource department in either the last municipality he'd worked for or the one before, so whether they felt disempowered or disaffected and unable to raise this, I don't know. But my sense was, really, why didn't they push human resource issues right to the forefront from day one of the amalgamation? However, it was left really to us, on the union level, to say, "hey, you can't do this folks. It's not fair play. And these are the outcomes. Are you aware that these may be your unintended consequences of having a lack of a process?" So we actually initiated these selection guidelines, too late, because people had already gone into positions. The damage had been done .... and what that did

was heighten that sense of "It's an Isengate takeover – they're getting the better positions in the organisation, they're getting the experience, even though we were being told that 'It doesn't matter what position you're in, when the permanent structure comes out, you're all in interim positions and everyone's up for grabs, you'll be able to apply for anything'." But of course, you know, if you're not getting the day to day experience, particularly at such a crucial time in the life of the organisation, particularly because we're doing new things, we're looking at competitive compulsive tendering, we're all learning new skills and new ways of doing things, so it's no wonder people felt like they were losing ... and feeling very much devalued and de-skilled in the process, so that's something we've been attempting to monitor from the union. While the outcome of that has been a lot of applications for redundancy, there's been over sixty that have gone, and basically people are ready to stampede out the doors at the moment (Interview with Red, February, 1995, p. 11).

In the context of this thesis this contribution is important because it emphasises how Red is aware of a strategy that not only renders employees as passive, but also takes away the very conditions that they need to participate and to transcend the limitation itself. The strategies of authorship at the level of the State Government have had another influence; they are what the new management is using to not only form the conditions for certain kinds of relationships, but also the kind of value that is placed on these conditions. The strategy seems to be to position certain



employees such that a distance is emphasised, rather than how that distance could be overcome to be productive and therefore valued, in individual lives.

Red – And there was not a lot going now to attach yourself to. But this continuity phase of constancy had certainly been hard hit. In terms of what was not changing, it was hard to see "well what isn't changing?" ... we are only running our services at a bare minimum, and professionally I find that I need to have projects and the intellectual stimulation of doing new things. I like to run groups. Well, I wouldn't dare at the moment plan a group, where I have to commit myself for maybe eight to ten weeks of ongoing group work. Because who knows if any of us are going to be around? It's a terrible thing! We're here at one level preparing ourselves for competitive tendering, with a view that yes, we're going to be here and we're going to win our tenders, but on another level, maybe we won't be here. Maybe when the permanent structure comes out there won't be a place for me. Or maybe the new breed will decide that no, they don't want to run the service like that. They want to run it another way. And maybe that won't be what's palatable to me, or professionally satisfying or the way I want to do my work. So yeah, talk about interim, being in limbo, what it's taught me is to value and to live with ambiguity and ambivalence more easily than I could in the past .... That I can't control a lot of things. The best I can do is work out the little area that's mine, where I can participate and have some control over my own working life, to appreciating permanence and actually reframe chaos into excitement, potential and growth, rather than anxiety and scare ... that's probably the crux

of it. Initially I found myself getting very attached to and drawing a sense of safety and security from some initial decisions – "Ah yes yes, we're okay. I like that one. Yes, I can see a place for me in the organisation. Yes, the service will still continue as is and won't be diminished." And that's another thing that's happening, services are being diminished ... and now there have been so many changes and I have been moved around so much as well, that I've decided that, well, the best you can do is you come in each day and off you go doing your best (Interview with Red, February, 1995, p. 14).

Here we can read how Red is living inside the uncertainty that the narrative process itself is generating for employees. He positions himself as part of the conditions that are the community of action, including his own feelings of ambivalence, and he concludes that there is no autonomy in regard to these conditions. It is notable that a reauthoring of this experience is considered and sought to some extent; excitement is desired rather than anxiety. Out of this comes a protended future as an employee of Solmarco; there is a place for Red in the new organisation and hence a kind of continuation of the story he saw for himself.

In the next story part we read that Red has gained a new position, which involves greater influence over the work of his department, and that a new manager is contributing to the conditions in which Red is able to reauthor himself.

Red – There are a lot of other things coming through that look very interesting in terms of the metaphors of this culture and there is this theme of 'the learning organisation'. Now that's being taken up both within the organisation [Solmarco] as well as outside [in the community].

Bonna – I have interviewed people who have said this is just all words, what does all this mean?

Red – I do think it is rhetoric. And it's up to both the individual level as well as in your team or department level to actually decide whether those principles are valuable and to be implemented. Like today we are going to go through a process of service reviews. There will be some community consultation involved and we talk about the focus group method of inquiry .... anyway I suggested that perhaps we could even write up that process for conducting the service review as a research – as part of this concept of being a learning organisation. And that was met with 'well if you want to do that that's a good idea', but everybody is overworked. They're very pragmatic. We need to get the task done ....

Bonna – So that's your individual contribution?

Red – That's me, trying to make myself a learning organisation ... it's a sense of putting values on the work that I am doing. That I'm not just responding pragmatically to the task.

Bonna – So you are trying to find meaning?

Red – That's right. Trying to find some meaning out of what at times seemed to be meaningless tasks.

Bonna – But do I detect that your attempts to do that ... are not being as successful as you would like?

Red – Well, everybody is so overworked that the thought of an additional task, particularly if you mention the word 'research', everybody thinks "oh heck it's going to be hard. And take a lot of time". Whereas I just think it is something we can build in as we go ....

Bonna – Like action research?

Red – ... Yes so it's not as if we're just really exhausted and inundated, and I .... I'm carrying it for a lot of people as well as myself.

Bonna – You've got a new position since I talked to you last.

Red – I'm the Team Leader of Community Care Department ... I was the acting manager [in the interim period] ... we've got four teams. The Community Care Team, which is the one that I applied for the Team Leader position .... we are responding not only to council demands to review our services and do things, you know document and write up procedures and do things differently, but there are also external [federal government] departments that are saying the same. I can see that there are some common themes ... but at the moment it feels like "oh we won't get the time to do it all". But it will happen.

Bonna – Now you report to?

Red – Swee. She's the manager .... I think they call it third tier. Yes, the first tier is the CEO. Second tier is the general managers. And fourth tier is my level. We're called Team Leaders, but we're also called Senior Executive Service ... And I'm enjoying Swee. She is a young dynamic woman ... and

she's had quite a lot of experience within health and community management. So in terms of knowing our funding services, knowing the region, having the contacts, she was a very good choice for the position. Very appropriate. And she's got lots of enthusiasm and energy and a lot of vision, I think she is ambitious and I think that she certainly wants our department to be seen as operating under sound principles ... in terms of her management style I like the way she consults and spends time and attends to the boundary issues and attends to supporting us in our role and her stated method of working is to give us time and support in the setting up stage. She expects we will be acting independently and there'll be no difficulty doing that. So in terms of a culture down here it seems interesting, I certainly see it as more open and independent than I experienced before at Anessa. Partially that's because I've got a position now, it means I'm involved in the decision making and the running of the place, whereas in the past we were very much kept out of that I think. So I think there is certainly room for a more independent collaborative way of working, rather than that dependency in the past ... we have tasks and deadlines to meet ... we can go away and do it and Swee provides quite a bit of structure initially defining what the task is ... It's a process of discovery. And every now and then one of us will find a report or some document from the past that sheds light on the present. So I use the word 'discovery'. And Swee is the Executive Ferret and I'm the Ferret in Training basically. This is the language that we use and we have in fact come up with a number of items that have helped us in terms of making sense of what our current role is, what

our job is and the information we are meant to provide to our funding bodies. So major major celebrations occur around discoveries. But we are working still in the dark. Bits of light then shoot in between.

Bonna – It seems that the old Anessa is dead. That [Solmarco] is a new organisation completely.

Red – What's interesting for me is to listen to the way the old Anessa is talked about and [the State Department of] Community Services does not view the City of Solmarco particularly well. Now having Swee here is repairing that relationship, but .... we've lost merit points. We now can only be given certain amounts of money and it takes a while apparently before we redeem ourselves ... apparently we will be penalised to some extent .... And so the previous Anessa manager was seen as bad ... represents the inefficient manager who didn't manage what he was doing and now we are coming in and we are going to be more efficient and we know what we are doing. And we are going to set this place on its ear! And it's working quite well .... I found myself getting angry in a meeting the other day when the denigration was occurring and I just observed it and I thought that's splitting and projection at work. Obviously we don't want to admit to ourselves that we're inadequate and not coping very well either. And it's easier to blame out there. .... And then there are a lot of inconsistencies, because Anessa was quite innovative actually – pioneered several services and has been seen to be a good place to be .... so on one level we are providing innovative services, but the management of those services hasn't been viewed very highly. And my

sense of myself in all that – I distance from all that because I was not part of that management. So when the denigration occurs I don't actually feel attacked. I can acknowledge that yes the management was really poor and there's a lot of things that I can't shed light on because I just wasn't involved. And that's a bit of a pity because had I known more ... We might not have had to start right from scratch (Interview with Red, October, 1995, p. 8).

Red has moved from a position of feeling constrained in the narrative-making space and time that was Anessa, to being a more active character with some powers of authorship. A possible richer story is emerging for his future as a result. The activity of the State Government that rendered Red temporarily passive through membership in Anessa is now overcome through the agency of a new manager who is reauthoring the story at the level of the department in which Red is employed. We could also conclude that Red is enabled to act through membership in the tradition itself, and that there could be a commitment that is ongoing in this regard. The goods being pursued can be integrated into a narrative that shapes further action and the future as a world of possibility.

### **6.5 Dune: "everything is in disarray"**

Those accounts seen above are rich in meaning partly because several interviews were possible with the informants. With regard to Dune only one interview was achieved. Dune described himself as a middle level administrator in the provision of cultural services in the City of Anessa. He had been in the organisation of Anessa for some five years.

Bonna – So how do you see what's been happening with the amalgamations?

Dune – Well, we seem to be quite divorced from things down here ... but because I'm one of the union shop stewards I get a lot of people ringing me up all the time and complaining about how they've been short-changed and their jobs don't exist any longer. So I get that on the phone, but not necessarily face to face. But I hear a lot of rumours and a lot of people ring me up all the time. But yeah, some terrible things have been happening. People's jobs have just been cut up and given to other people. I imagine that some of those things have happened because management might have wanted to get rid of some people. Although that has never been stated. But it appears to have been like that, and people who have seen that their job won't exist in the new organisation have gotten out and they're all quite bitter about that and I can understand that.

Bonna – So the people whose jobs have been cut up, is that happening recently as part of the new restructuring?

Dune – Yes.

Bonna – So it wasn't something that was happening when the announcements were made?

Dune – No, no things haven't really hit until the last few months really. At the time we were all quite optimistic, but not at the moment. Things aren't very optimistic and I think ex-Anessa people are feeling pretty despondent because all of their managers have just about gone, all of the directors are either gone



or going, so they're feeling as though it's a bit of a take-over I suppose (Interview with Dune, May, 1995, p. 1).

At this time in the development of Solmarco, Anessa employees are making an account that positions Isengate as more powerful, and there seems to be less emphasis on the activities of the State Government. But as we saw above, Ki and most of the other Isengate senior staff were not successful in obtaining a position in the new Solmarco. We saw that there were forces at work at the level of the field that ensured the influence from Isengate was of short duration, even though Isengate went on being active longer in the argument than Anessa.

Bonna – So when you say optimism before Christmas, can you tell me a bit more about that?

Dune – Well, we were quite optimistic within our small arts and culture department, because Isengate didn't have anything similar to what we had. [There were] lots of special projects out there in the community with artists ... and that didn't appear to be happening in Isengate and we thought, 'this is great, we can extend this program over the whole new city,' and we were excited about that. We're still fairly optimistic that that's going to happen because the new CEO seems to think that what we're doing is quite good (Interview with Dune, May, 1995, p. 3).

This suggests that employees like Dune could be optimistic at this time in the merger because of the tradition to which they had belonged. That is, they were enabled to act in relation to what was valued because they still valued the goods of the tradition, and were continuing to participate at the level of public service practice.

Their new narrative brought together the differences between Anessa and Isengate, but also opened a protended future in which there were possibilities for action.

This optimism is accompanied by uncertainty over the management structures that were being changed at this time. Again there is a sense that a trusted narrator is not present:

Dune – We haven't got the new director in place and nobody knows what's going on at the moment, unfortunately. Everything is in disarray (Interview with Dune, May, 1995, p. 4).

As with Rom and Keep, there are seen to be opportunities opening up even though there is 'disarray'. Dune is looking to the future in regard to presenting an unfinished autobiography:

Dune – I'll be reporting to the cultural development officer, and I also hope to be taking on the role of part-time curator of the collection too. We've got a collection worth over a million dollars ... and a colleague of ours left recently ... and they did advertise internally to see if anybody was interested. And I wasn't at first. But I think I'd like to do it now, and maybe just do the [the management position] four days a week. So I've put that proposal to the CEO, so I hope it comes off, because that will make things a bit more challenging for me over the next couple of years (Interview with Dune, May, 1995, p. 5).

Dune has decided to be part of what is happening in the hope that the kinds of public services that were possible in the past may still be possible. And of course Dune is not at a level that means he has lost his position in the space itself:

Dune – A lot of good people are going. It's not just what they anticipated – the old wood, the rotten wood going. It's a lot of good people as well.... Yes, and a lot of people are finding really good jobs, and going. And some of them are getting a package and some of them are not. Some of them are quite honest and say they've got another job to go to and won't wait until another package comes up.

Bonna – So do you have a sense of how that's affecting the community as a whole?

Dune – Oh, well I think a lot of people are still in the dark about what's going on and think everything's okay. But a number of people have rung me up or spoken to other people that I know, about things being slower and things not happening. I'm still quite friendly with a lot of ex-councillors, and I'm on committees with them. And I'm also on this community relations committee ... and we're trying to get a community consultation program working as well. And Anessa previously had this great program called 'In Touch' up and running, and in each ward the councillor met with residents once a month to talk over different issues or local area issues, and get things off their chest, so ... whatever the council did wasn't undermined by resident groups. It was very good for the council and they had a good rapport with residents. And we're trying to get something similar running throughout the whole municipality now. But there has been, unfortunately, a lot of anxiety expressed by ex-'In touch' co-ordinators because they want to still run the exact same program but the Commissioners won't fund nine or twelve parts

of the municipality with a co-ordinator and with all the administrative support that it needs ... So they want to do it their own way, and I suppose these community consultation programs, these new ones, are going to be sort of directed more by the new council than they were by the residents.

Bonna – Oh right, so the commissioners want that sort of power...

Dune – Yes. Yes.

Bonna – They're saying we hold the purse strings here and we want it done the way we want it to be done, and there's considerable community concern about that.

Dune – They feel that the power has been taken away from them, that they had in the past. But I don't think...I mean, it has in a way. They still want to be seen to be communicating with the residents and I don't think they should criticise whatever comes up until it's up and running and we can see some sort of an outcome. It might still work in the residents' favour and I'm sure it will – 'cause not many other municipalities are doing the same thing (Interview with Dune, May, 1995, p. 9).

From this contribution we see the unfolding at the level of activity that is 'the organisation' and how this is an influence on those employees who want to continue and value certain kinds of public services. Again we can see Dune as a reader who has gained competence in regard to a particular tradition of readings. In his reading the future for community participation on the part of ratepayers is seen to be constrained according to what the Commissioners are doing on behalf of the narrative

of local government reform that we saw above has its sources in economic rationalism. Even though the State Government has argued that costs to ratepayers will be cut and this is in the latter's interest, the question of how this will be achieved is contributing to anxiety about the public services on offer and whether these are sustainable under this narrative. Furthermore we can see Dune being informed by the tradition through those same communities of ratepayers that the State Government and Tem claim to represent. Employees such as Dune have a close relationship in the social spaces with these communities, and define themselves accordingly. The community of action in this employee's story would be construed as inclusive of the organisation and the community served.

From Dune we also see the kind of narrative synthesis of opposites that we saw was present for Ki in his position as CEO of Isengate, but in Dune's story we see this achievement in relation to Tem as the new CEO, and furthermore we see it from another position, that of a staff member. Again we would have to say that this activity, as refiguration in operation, is enabled because Dune continues to belong to the narrative-making space that is Solmarco. This shows the kind of constraints that economic rationalism brings into the narrative-making space of the new organisation, but also how these come to be refigured through the narrative activity of individual employees.

Dune – And apparently they opened the champagne when he announced that he was going [from his previous position], and people have said to us, ‘you poor things,’ and ‘he’s very manipulative’ and ‘he’s an economic rationalist and just beware,’ and ‘just whatever he asks you, do it.’

And ah, 'you don't mess with him' .... So it's a matter of seeing what comes out of that. But in all my dealings with him so far he's been quite reasonable and fair, and very approachable ... he's interested in the arts at grass roots level too .... not just a five day a week manager. He's out there seven days a week doing things in the community (Interview with Dune, May, 1995, p. 9).

Even though only one interview was possible with Dune the above shows again how narrative activity at the level of employee is both constrained by the actions of the State Government and enabled because there is still a tradition of public service at the local government level. It seems likely that Dune has both the narrative competence, and access to capital in the form of time and space to tell a story, that will enable this integration of the organisation transformation into the level of activity that is personal. The unfinished autobiography accounts for the activity of living inside these dynamics, as well as the activity of reauthoring the truth claims that are present in economic rationalism. Through this the possibility of being able to contribute to the ongoing argument over public services remains an open one even though this is not yet being facilitated at the level that is Solmarco.

#### **6.6 Tem: "it's a wonderful opportunity"**

Tem was the new CEO appointed to head up the new organisation of Solmarco. As we saw above he had the appropriate habitus to undertake the major local government reforms that the State Government were implementing. He was enabled to act in a powerful authorship position in relation to the narrative-making space that was Solmarco, and this was so because of a synthesis. He was able to

aspire to a position as an active character in the living narrative considered above under the name 'economic rationalism'.

From what we already know it is not difficult to read Tem's account and appreciate the assertion by MacIntyre (1981) that one cannot separate the intentions of an agent from the conditions that contribute to those intentions being formed. Although only one interview was possible with Tem this is an account that shows a person with considerable power to influence what is emerging. We could also see this as an account of a person who has made a transformation at the level of activity that is 'person', and that co-creation is at work. This reader is competent because of his participation in a tradition of readings that has been construed here as economic rationalism. Even though the rhetorical position is taken that democracy is a good to be aspired to in local government, Tem's approach is very different to those we have seen expressed by other informants.

Bonna – Can you tell me about the amalgamation from your perspective?

Tem – Well I've come in to it very late. I've only been in the City for nine weeks and the amalgamation was well advanced by that stage. What issues would you like me to discuss in relation to that question?

Bonna – Well, I suppose one of the things that comes to mind is what's the Council now? It's moved from being a democratically based body –

Tem – Right, right.

Bonna – to being something that's quite different I think at the moment.

Shirley – Yes, yes, well at the moment we're constrained by what the State Government has done – which is abolish the democratically elected Council members and put in Commissioners. So it is quite different.

Bonna – Do you see that changing again?

Tem – Has to. It has too. In March 1997 we'll be going back to democratically elected councillors.

Bonna – So your position will be – is certainly one of change at the moment.

Tem – Oh yes. Yes, managing tremendous change which was very necessary in local government. It had started in some cities and not in others. It was significantly down the track at Isengate and hadn't begun at Anessa. And that could be replicated right across the state. Local government was being left out of management reform by and large and drastically needed change.

Bonna – When you say management reform – can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Tem – Well – good management practices. People had done traditionally what they had done for many years – they were worried about process instead of outcomes. There'd been gross waste of public money – ratepayers money. And people had sat in the same positions for twenty to thirty years without gaining the advantages of strategic thinking that comes with – from moving around – people skills which come from being introduced to new situations. So, the change has been timely and necessary and even though there are



aspects of it that we might not be happy about, by and large it will be a very productive thing for Victoria and for local government and for communities.

Bonna – When you say aspects that we might not be happy about –

Tem – Well people would like democratically elected councillors and I would too. I'm committed to democracy and we all are, but if democratically elected councillors can't make appropriate management decisions, then there has to be some way of reforming local government. In due course democratically elected councillors will come back.

Bonna – So that sort of process of almost intervention from the State Government level was a necessary process.

Tem – Yes, yes in my view – in my view it has been.

Bonna – And do you think that's working?

Tem – Yes, I do. I do. And it will remain to be seen how effective we are as managers and how effective the Commissioners are as to whether we achieve the objectives. And that is patchy right across the State because it does depend on the quality of the Commissioners and it will depend on the quality of the administrators. But the opportunity is amazing. Opportunity to appoint really good administrators, both inside and outside local government. For those administrators to set up their own teams, to set visions, to absolutely do the strategic thinking and planning, that involves having a corporate plan, developing business plans, developing action plans – that were not going on

in most of the cities. It's a wonderful opportunity (Interview with Tem, May, 1995, p.1-3).

We have seen, according to Schelling (1800/1978), that at the more productive levels it becomes more difficult to satisfy complex requirements for maintenance. For Tem there is a challenge at the level of person that is unique at this time of the merger. The challenge is to be open to refiguration such that a life that has come a long way on the values espoused in economic rationalism can also be open to a community of activity that occurs at the local government level. We gained a sense of this in Dune's account. There may be constraints on the organisation Solmarco such that it is not able to act back at this point in time, and elected representatives have been dismissed as we have seen, but elections will be held again. The CEO of Solmarco will have to be accountable to many agents who wish to participate in the ongoing argument at the level that is local government. This will act to constrain the process whereby the CEO is himself emerging.

### **6.7 Living at the Cusp**

These parts of stories are offered in this thesis for the purpose of giving prominence to employees as processes of becoming. They can be construed as parts of personal stories, but they also show how employees are engaged in the activities of making shared meaning, making positions and making narratives, and as we have seen above these activities are not discrete properties of the various levels of activity that are considered in this thesis.

It is now appropriate to ask about these story parts in relation to the dynamics that these informants are engaged in. Although more possibilities are opened up than can be discussed, and these must await further research, we could conclude from the above story parts that there are certain dynamics at the level of activity that is 'person' and there are also conditions that support their emergence as living forms. We could include here the movement that could take an employee from passive character towards greater authorship and perhaps authenticity; refiguration such that a narrative of a life is construed in terms of an enlarged narrative and the dynamics of larger narrative-making spaces such as organisations and fields; refiguration that enables a protended future to be opened again such that new possibilities could be emergent; and the generating of a habitus whereby the time to tell a story and the space to tell a story could be appropriated as forms of symbolic capital that could enable refiguration of a life so that the goods at the various levels of activity could be convergent.

There is unity of a project that could be said to be present at the level of a life. That is, these informants are each presenting themselves as an unfinished autobiography in which they are the central agent and have the one trajectory (Bourdieu, 1998b). This is akin to what Ricoeur (1992) calls the 'sameness'; we are the same person over time. On the other side of this dynamic is what we have seen described above as the development of selfhood, and as we saw this involves reauthorship or refiguration of a life. It is through this dynamic that informants engage in different levels of mediation that enable one to become more competent in the process itself. Narrative theory enables us to consider this dynamic.

The constraints that were narrated at the level of the State Government were an influence on the new organisation Solmarco and the employees whom we see above. According to MacIntyre (1977) an 'epistemological crisis' occurs when the relationship of 'seems' and 'is' fails to support the kind of inductions that we tend to make in everyday life about the future behaviour of others. He argues that a crisis not only calls for reauthorship, it also presents an opportunity for development of a person's understanding of the process itself. Narrative activity that is operational at the larger level of social forms is also part of the process of narrating an identity. "The narrative in terms of which he or she at first understood and ordered experiences is itself made into the subject of an enlarged narrative" (MacIntyre, 1977, p. 455). Progress in terms of the resolution of such a crisis is what he calls the construction and reconstruction of more adequate narratives. Such crises are the occasions for this reconstruction, and they form the conditions under which we achieve authenticity. The merger of Anessa and Isengate did provide the conditions that called for transformation on the part of the employees considered in this thesis.

In regard to the process of interpretation that is ongoing at the level of field, we saw that Rom takes a position that closes his story to an assertion about what public servants do. We saw that Ki was already engaged in a reauthoring of 'public service' that positioned him as a reformer. We saw that for Keep there was an opening up of possibilities and a career as a public servant was not distinguishable from other kinds of careers. For Red we saw that there was acceptance of a period of uncertainty, coupled with enough openness to enable the new manager, Sweep, to work in a co-creative manner on those conditions that would enable both employees and a part of

the new organisation to be emergent. We saw that Red was invited into that process as an active character in the new story.

These employees are living inside the dynamics of local government reform, and each are more or less engaged in the refiguration that this calls for. An important question is whether the conservative position and matching narrative activity at the level of the State Government is so constraining of this employee activity that there are forms of life adversely affected. Very early in this thesis we saw how Allen and Starr (1982) argue that components in systems may contribute to the ordering process not because of what they do but because of what they are not allowed to do. Included under the notion of 'constraint' we could list the following: a position that sought to influence habitus through membership restrictions; closure of the future to one story, and no use of the kind of sideshadowing that could permit an emergent identity to unfold in time; imposition of a new story that was so coherent as to permit no authorship activity on the part of employees who were positioned into 'passive character'; a symbolically powerful position that imposed a meaning onto 'public service' and claimed that its own position was superior to the tradition itself as a living ongoing argument; and closure of the narrative-making space at the level of organisation such that some employees found themselves no longer members of the process at this level of activity. We could conclude that these are the conditions in which the informants found themselves, and that their project of living out a narrative identity was influenced by these constraints. Through narrative activity in the more complex levels of the field employees found themselves constrained through what they were not allowed to do and as we have seen this was a property of the dynamic

relationship of the various levels of activity. The 'text' as a process of becoming is to this extent foreign; it constrains those conditions that enable action to be taken by employees.

In his reading activity Ki was able to move his level of operations from the level that constituted Isengate to the level of field, and thereby could remain as a player in the complex dynamics that were then emergent in the transformation of local government. In other words an employee could carry the mediation past the point of a constraint by moving his own operations to a higher level of activity in regard to the narrative-making spaces that were available. But Ki clearly had sufficient capital to do this. Through the activity of reading he was capable of carrying the mediation past the point of constraint at the level that was 'the organisation', thereby generating a new and more coherent narrative out of the seemingly discordant activity/passivity inherent in the character position. By engaging in this activity with some success, as Ki demonstrates, there is an increased level of narrative competence. This enabled him to be a force that acted back through his appointment to a new position in the field. Each successful transformation of this kind acts as an enabler in the manner given prominence by Gare (1996) when he argues that humans can see themselves as self-creative participants in the becoming of nature and society.

Another example is the narrative activity that enables an employee to reauthor such that a smaller narrative, say of a life, is understood in regard to the larger dynamics. This would also be transformative as an activity that the employee engages in as part of self-organisation. Keep showed how the loss of an immediate prospect of

promotion was a constraint that moved him to gain a broader sense of his own position in regard to the narrative-making space of Solmarco. In Keep's story we saw that his position as a young person could be narrated in such a way that he opened up possibilities beyond both the organisation and the field. There was a counterbalance to the influence of the higher order narrative activity. The employee as a process of becoming is at a time of life when there is the prospect of an extended life, and the time-of-a-life can be construed as a whole that is less constrained according to his account.

Employees could also seek to shift themselves from the position of 'living inside', to the position of author such that the complexity of what was happening could be brought adequately into one grasp. Ki's reference to 'the religion of Spring Street' can be seen as an example of this. He was positioned as 'dismissed', but was able to reauthor himself as being both able to take a counter-position to the State Government but also retain a position as a player with symbolic capital.

Red was seen to be using strategies that enabled him to act back on the constraint as well. We saw in Red's story an attempt to work along with the constraint and to find in this process a kind of practical wisdom that was to do with the experience of time. In this regard Red took up a stance that time could have an openness of possibility at the level that was Solmarco. There was a preparedness to live inside this openness and not accept that the future would be closed to promotion. Red's unfolding autobiography also was facilitated by a new manager, Sweep.

Unlike Red, Rom narrated his own position as one of experiencing difficulties. The removal of key agents in the form of the senior managers he had

known at Isengate was a constraint that could be transformative of his own action if he could establish new modes of recognition or build on existing recognition at the level of field as Ki had done. In addition the other collective who could have power to influence the narrative-making space was the union, and according to Rom the union had less of a position of influence in Solmarco than it had had in Isengate where he had worked. In regard to a time-of-a-life and an account that would be adequate to his planned life, we found that he was now lamenting the management position he thought he could have achieved by the time he was in his 30s. He was 36, and the position he sought was constrained from becoming because of the emergent nature of Solmarco. While he was resolute that his narrative about 'public service' was both counter to that of the State Government and good according to his position, the goods of the tradition itself seemed to be under sustained force at the level of the relationship of field to organisation. He did not know at this time whether there would be a future for a commitment to public service as an activity that was not constrained to be economically viable.

These activities of transformation assist us to understand and account for how a person is both a process of becoming as well as a participant in the narrative-making space as an agent of co-creation. In other words reading is the mediator in the process of co-creation, understood as the achievement of the relationship of the world of the text, the world of the author and the world of the reader. For employees what is being created at the level of personal world, has its simultaneous evolving process at the level of the organisation. By becoming competent in these transformations at the various levels, employees become transforming agents themselves. But it can also be



argued that these are cognitive capacities that require healthy fields and traditions if the capacities themselves are to be emergent.

For employees we could conclude that the cognitive capacity to imagine oneself as moving from a position of 'character' into a position of 'authorship' is central to personal narrative activity at a time of organisational merger. This capacity is co-creative because of the various levels of self-organisation, and because these levels are characterised as both processes and achievements, the relationship of employee to organisation at a time of organisational merger is a productive one. However, narrative activity is influenced by positioning to the extent that 'time to tell a story' and 'space to tell a story' are contested resources at a time of organisational merger. One's position not only limits one's capacity to make narratives and to move from a position of passivity, it also enables one to make narratives that account for this kind of positioning.

## **Part 7 Narrative Identity at a Time of Organisational Merger**

This thesis is about narrative activity in a merger and how this activity contributes to the emergence of a new sense of self for employees. Following a consideration of the literature on mergers, where the argument is made that a merger is a clash of cultures and that employees may therefore be faced with an adjustment to a different culture, it was suggested in this thesis that a fresh approach could be taken in the form of a synthesis of narrative theory and social theory. This synthesis could take its departure from an argument that is already present in the literature; it posits the existence of the activity of cultivation, construed also as the activity of making shared meaning. But it was argued in this thesis that to make this move, narrative activity would need to be construed as central to the activity of making shared meaning. Current treatment of narrative ideas in the literature on mergers suggests that narrative activity could be afforded more serious attention; for example the particular question addressed in this thesis could open a new line of inquiry that gives greater prominence to the dynamic 'activity/passivity' than it does to the dynamics of 'productive/unproductive' or 'fiction/non-fiction'. Furthermore, it was suggested that this move to give prominence to narrative activity is appropriate given the renewed interest in narrative ideas that is occurring both inside and outside of management studies, and the calls for better theories of action as these are already apparent in management studies.

According to the ideas of Schelling (1800/1978) there are forces present at various levels of productivity, and these are formative of those conditions that both enable and constrain productivity at the level of an employee's life. In this regard a

narrative account of a life is a form of product that is achievable through the process, but it is the forces present in the making of this account that are of interest in this thesis. Therefore this thesis began by considering the conditions in which the new organisation of Solmarco came into being through the agency of the State Government. Solmarco was construed as a process of becoming that is occurring at the level of sub-field, and fields, such as that of government, were construed as processes of becoming that are distillations of the cultural dialectics. The last was construed as being emergent at the level of society.

It was argued that the making of shared meaning, in this instance the ongoing argument over what constitutes public service activity, is formative of the field of government in Australia, and that in turn the interpretations that are achieved in this process contribute the conditions in which new interpretations of 'public service' could be achieved. We saw how employees, such as Ki, Red, Dune, Rom, and Keep, are contributors and live inside this process through membership in the social spaces that are achieved within the tradition about what constitutes public service activity. At the time of the merger an interpretation was achieved by the State Government, and as we saw, that interpretation was imposed onto local government organisations which were already existing at the level of sub-field. The conditions for this action were present in the relationship of organisation as sub-field to the field itself. These social spaces at the level of organisation, construed as Anessa and Isengate, enabled individual employees, by virtue of their participation in the process itself, to engage in the activity of making new interpretations about their own contribution. But we saw that different interpretations were made as the ongoing argument took different

forms of achievement in the two organisations. While the interpretations of employees are mediated by their position (in either of Anessa or Isengate), they are nevertheless enabled to act because they share a space of activity and a tradition at the level of the field. In other words because the joining of the two organisations brings the two sub-fields into one at the time of the merger, employees are enabled to make interpretations in regard to the sub-fields as they were and the new sub-field as they foresee it could become. The new sub-field of Solmarco was in the process of being formed, and we saw that there are forces, both temporal and spatial, that influence the relationship of the level of activity that is field and the level of activity that is organisation. We could conclude that Solmarco was a living achievement that was evolving, as a process of becoming, inside the conditions for its own formation.

This relationship of field to sub-field is formative because there is an ongoing argument that is formative of the field itself as a process of becoming, but we saw that no position can be argued in a tradition or field unless the narrative form of discourse is used and competence in this form is gained. While there is the activity of making shared meaning over what constitutes 'public service activity', the interpretations made are in the form of narratives that can potentially be emplotted into larger narratives. It was therefore argued that narrative activity is central to human activity. Agents both live inside this as a form of productivity *and* achieve texts that have narrative form (being mindful that 'text' broadly conceived includes actions). As this is a creative process, engaged in by agents, we can ask about agency through the questions that pertain to 'who?'.

In this regard we saw that the State Government of Victoria imposed an interpretation onto local government through their narrative about local government reform, and this action could operate to limit or constrain other interpretations that could potentially be made about what constituted public services at the local level. At this level of general interpretation we saw that employees of the former organisations of Anessa and Solmarco could make their own interpretation regarding the actions of the State Government and what is constitutive of their position as the providers of public services, but that these were likely to be constrained by the nature of the argument itself. The State Government appeared to construe 'tradition' as that which was past and no longer living, but this denied the way in which the tradition itself enabled employees to act by virtue of their membership in the tradition as an ongoing and living achievement. The State Government strategy at this level seemed to be that their own position both contributed to the ongoing argument and transcended the argument itself. Hence a major constraint on employee interpretations was that anyone who planned to invoke the tradition to support their activity was faced with a counter position claiming that the tradition itself was dead. The living tradition was transcended, according to the State Government argument, by this new claim to a prevailing position of influence that they had achieved.

It was then argued in this thesis that narrative activity is a form of productivity that is creative, and that achievements of the process both enable and constrain further action. Prominence was given to this process as a series of narrative operations, those of prefiguration, configuration and refiguration. In regard to narrative activity, narratives could emerge to counter the narrative of local government reform.

In this thesis 'productivity' was defined according to the dynamic relation of 'activity' to 'passivity'. But it was of note that the stance taken in this thesis in this regard differs from other contributions in management studies, in particular those in the practice of management that emphasise productive/non-productive as a dynamic, or those in management studies that emphasise fiction/non-fiction as a dynamic. These other contributions can be seen to emphasise how narratives can be products with certain qualities, and this contrasts to an emphasis that gives prominence to living narratives as processes of becoming that have duration in time and the potential to be related to each other.

So rather than construe employee accounts of themselves as products that stand autonomous from the activity that was evolving at the level of Solmarco, it was argued in this thesis that there is an activity/passivity dynamic and differing levels of self-organising activity, and these are formative of those very conditions that enable an employee to engage in the narrative activity whereby a personal account can be achieved.

Productivity was also seen to be descriptive of the process whereby shared meaning is achieved such that an interpretation that has already been achieved in the space is reinterpreted. We saw in this regard how Rom made his own interpretation of the meaning of 'public service', and that this incorporated the State Government position but with different values accorded to 'economic'. For Rom public service was construed with renewed emphasis that public service is an activity that does not have to be economically viable in order to prove its worth. Such an interpretation seeks to both overcome some of the constraint inherent in a previous interpretation *and*

ensures that the tradition of interpretation is itself a living tradition. The health of the tradition, which is actively furthered by a definition that gives prominence to 'activity', as in 'public service is an activity', is considered to be at risk when one position claims to be more powerful than the tradition itself.

Because of this presence of the living tradition there was achievement of shared meaning at both Anessa and Isengate, and this was considered in the light of their response as communities of action that had the capacity to influence, or 'act back', on the argument itself. As part of the process of becoming of Solmarco these interpretations, as actions achieved in the process of interpretation, were part of the transformation underway at the level of activity that was 'the organisation'. We saw that a time came when employees of the two former organisations were able to achieve a new meaning that the old organisations had effectively died, and something new had emerged to take their place. This interpretation was narrated as a 'death'; at the level of the tradition the organisations of Anessa and Isengate no longer made a living contribution. By the time the new CEO had been appointed, the process of becoming for Solmarco no longer permitted of shared meaning to be achieved through what had been known as Anessa and Isengate. While groups of employees could possibly have acted to form shared meaning by virtue of the old boundaries that had been achieved between the two former organisations, this seemed to gradually become more unlikely. For example no senior managers existed as a collective from the old forms, and there would be no authorisation of a narrative-making space through this agency. We could conclude that the State Government had put

considerable constraint on any organisational response to the ongoing argument about what constituted a public service activity.

Productivity was also considered to be present in what we have seen as the activity of taking a position in social space. We saw how Tem, the new CEO of Solmarco, is both positioned by the field *and* able to aspire to such a position by virtue of the symbolic capital held, capital that enables him to act as an agent of the State Government. The latter is also seen to be drawing on the symbolic capital in the field when a position is mandated that brings local government into coherence with an ideology advocated at the state and federal levels of government. This ideology, regarded from narrative theory as part of a tradition of readings, is advocated from a position of symbolic strength in the field of government that encompasses local government. It enables action to be taken on its behalf at the level of field.

The narrative given by the State Government was considered in this thesis through the forms of their report and certain contributions made by members of the government in parliamentary debates at the State Government level, where the legislation enables action to be taken in regard to local government reform. But it was argued in this thesis that the notion of 'text' must be open to broad definition such that the activity of the State Government can be thought about in relation to the process underway. Firstly, we must be able to account for an authorship position that seeks to limit the life of the text to ensure that the text has a quality of closure. For example the State Government version of local government reform, as seen in their debates and report, was constrained in regard to the activity of reauthorship. We saw, using the language of social theory, that some were privileged to engage in authorship



because they were positioned by the field as accomplices in symbolic construction, and that they may have been suited to this because they had a habitus appropriate to this positioning. The new CEO of Solmarco was appointed from a position that favoured the tradition of readings known in Australia as economic rationalism, and it was shown that there are similarities of interpretation between this tradition and the actions of the State Government. But secondly it was argued that from the position of undertaking this research, a 'text' is a kind of product and as such is not autonomous from the productivity that enables it to be achieved. From this position it is possible to both live inside the State Government narrative activity as a reader of their report, but also move, through that same activity of reading, to a stance that their position is not autonomous from the conditions of its own production. Again speaking of Tem we can conclude that certain members of the new Solmarco were positioned by the field because they could be relied on to keep the text as a living achievement that would continue to position employees as passive according to the preferred position of the State Government narrative. Through Tem's appropriation and some reauthorship at this level the narrative was to be kept alive.

It was argued in this thesis that the State Government was enabled to act in relation to the lives of employees in local government, and that two sources of prior narrative activity could enable their own position to be a living force. Firstly there had been many calls for local government reform. This ongoing argument over local government reform had a history at the level of the State. Secondly there was this espousal of economic rationalism, and it can be shown that this has a history at the national and international level as a living tradition of readings known as

neoliberalism. In the State Government at this time the conservative parties, in the form of a Liberal/National coalition, held power to form the legislation. Through their own narrative about local government reform they were enabled to act, but they were also enabled and constrained in regard to this neoliberal ideology that they espoused. This ideology enables the State Government's narrative activity because it too has a life at the level of field. However, it is the State Government actions in regard to employees in local government that are of interest in this thesis. The narrative activity at the level of field, which we saw encompassed both certain interpretations and certain favoured positions, both enabled and constrained employees of the old organisations, Anessa and Isengate; for example some employees were dismissed from their positions in local government and thereby became passive characters according to the narrative. As the Liberal/National coalition characterised their own position as that of a conservative force, it was possible to give prominence to the constraints imposed by the various authorial strategies used by the State Government parliamentarians in relation to employees. At the level of activity that is 'person' these constraints were played out in the lives of employees. At the level of activity that was 'the organisation' these constraints could be traced through 'economic rationalism' as a living narrative at the level of field. It could be seen that these levels are processes of becoming that are not separate and autonomous from each other.

It was then possible in this thesis to consider how these dynamics form the conditions for productivity in an individual life. On this basis some of the parts of the stories of informants were introduced. The intention was to look at the forces of productivity at these levels and how these could bring constraints into lives,

constraints that could then be overcome according to the competence of the employee to engage in this activity of transformation.

According to narrative theory employees are actively emergent beings living out a process of narrative identity. In other words each is a process of becoming in the seeking of authenticity (Carr, 1986), and the capacity to pursue authenticity involves the making of choices supported by certain competencies in narrative making that in turn support the process itself. We saw from Ricoeur (1992) that a series of dialectics are at work in the process of narrating an identity, and that these form the conditions whereby a person is both the same person over time, *and* actively engaged in a project of selfhood. For Ricoeur (1984, 1992) this tension is creative, hence we can consider, with the aid of this theory combined with the work of MacIntyre (1977, 1981) Carr (1986), and Bourdieu (1998), the manner in which that productivity present in the dynamics of organisation and field was also productive in the lives of employees. The process of transformation at the level of employee was construed in this thesis in terms of the centrality of another activity, that of reading. It was argued that an employee could read, at various levels of mediation, what was the becoming-text at the level of Solmarco. The imposed constraints on the authorship activity of that employee would be the conditions for a new sense of self to be emergent.

So during the merger, which was an action that brought about the achievement of the new organisation of Solmarco, employees were living inside the dynamics of the 'becoming-text', construed as the simultaneity of the new organisation as an actively emergent being and their own unfolding and unfinished life narrative and the activity inherent to that. But we saw in the personal stories that various kinds of

narrative closure were in operation as if what was imposed at the level of the organisation was an autonomous text.

This thesis then considered how these actions played out at the levels of self-organisation that were 'the organisation' and 'person'. At the level of 'the organisation' senior managers and the former CEOs were removed from their positions according to the narrative of local government reform, and thereby lost membership in the narrative-making space at the level of Solmarco. Closure was effected at the level of organisation that was Anessa and Isengate, and we saw that in Anessa there was a shared meaning event that signalled the end of this organisation as a force that could 'act back' at the level of the field, but that for Isengate there was shared meaning achieved over the decision to exert a counter force on the State Government decision over who would be merged with whom. There was also an attempt by the State Government to narrate the future as the one preferred viable trajectory, given as the threats seen in the contribution of the new CEO of Solmarco. These threats were narrated in the form of this dynamic: accept 'economic rationalism' and become its accomplice or face an uncertain future with no prospect of being able to compete in Asia.

At the level of employee this thesis showed how these constraints could be transforming for those with the capital to restore themselves. By making the transformation from passive character to a balance of active/passive participant, an employee could move from one level of self-organisation to another, possibly more complex adaptation.

At the level of employee there is a cognitive capacity to know one's place; to seek to understand the different levels of organisation and their complexity; to strive to acquire the contested resources of 'time to tell a story' and 'space to tell a story'; to move from the position of 'character' towards a position of authorship in one's own life; and to understand how the 'little stories of everyday life' and one's own story are part of larger narrative-making dynamics. In other words the process itself is one of transformation, but one's competence in it is part of a community of action.

In asking how local government employees could hold the State Government to account for what they author, we must conclude that their only course of action is to make an argument communally and to use narrative as a discourse form. Their competence in narrative activity then becomes part of the conditions for self-organising, and the future emergence of the organisation and field.

Because of this complexity it is also appropriate at a practical level to assist managers to attend to the conditions of transformation which influence self-organising activity, and to appreciate how such activity is co-creative at the levels of person, organisation and field. In management studies we could contribute to the process of forming social spaces that are encouraging of co-creativity. This would involve paying attention to these cognitive skills so that we know more about how people go through transitions that are part themselves of the complex dynamics of larger social systems. Such an effort would be directed towards a larger inquiry, and this would consider how narrative activity and positioning contribute to the conditions for self-organisation at the various levels of organising activity. In turn this would presuppose that the activity of making theory is an important part of the

process of developing management studies. We could ask about the narrative activity that forms the conditions for management research to further this direction.

According to Schelling (1800/1978) we can only seek to understand what 'self' is by describing the activity whereby it comes about. But he also argues that we can only experience what the self is by bringing it forth. Identity is then the identity of being and producing that is fundamental in 'self'. From this we could conclude that the dynamics of narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1992) at the level of 'person', are the 'producing' and the account that is made. As seen above in some of the story parts of employees, this producing is not isolated from the producing that is simultaneous at other levels of self-organisation. 'Being as such is merely the expression of an impeded freedom' (Schelling, 1800/1978), and that which is opposed to self is part of self.

When I set out to ask the question considered in this thesis I did not appreciate that it is possible to consider in one grasp both the experience of some employees *and* the dynamics of the 'lived experience' of an organisational merger. But now, going further, it is my contention that we can grasp some of the complexity of these dynamics 'as if' we are inside the experience of the merger and that this movement is facilitated by narrative activity as it is seen in this thesis.

Following the general systems theory of Allen and Starr (1982) we could argue that the very competence that an employee has in narrative making is an emergent property of the hierarchy itself, because without this the health of traditions and fields and culture would not be assured. On this basis it is my contention that the current view of employees portrayed in the literature on mergers does not adequately

account for the complexity present in the lived experience of a merger. While we can demonstrate the differences in organisation culture, we are constrained under this approach to an account that posits the need for employees to adapt to a new or different culture. But this constraint, which has its origins in certain presuppositions about objective and subjective realities, does not adequately account for the question of *how*, at the level of employee activity, employees are enabled to be purposeful in their response. For example the argument that there are stages of progression could be enriched by the theory of reading. Reading is an activity that enables a person to take the mediation past the point of constraint at various levels. One can read one's own position and make an account but one can also refigure earlier achievements in meaning. One may gain a new sense of self in regard to the hierarchy of activity that is present. But as we have seen this hierarchy includes those dynamics at the level of activity that is 'self'.

It is concluded that employees could be encouraged to value themselves as processes of becoming, and this is a major contribution that they make to the field and sub-field. This contrasts to a management position that employees are objects that can be acted upon such that they can be constrained to no action themselves. Living in the emergent field and sub-field, and having the capacity to read this dynamic and contribute to it, should be valued over the claim to dominance for the narrative of the State Government. An employee lives inside this activity that is operational on a larger scale, and the health of the organisation being formed, is therefore also of interest. Rather than an organisation being reliant on a unified or strong organisation culture (Cartright & Cooper, 1996; Weber, 1996), it could be that it is the striving

towards this that is enabling of those facilitative constraints that could emerge to support the activity of employees. This could mean fostering the conditions that enable a new organisation to emerge that has the capacity to act back on, or be assertive with, the conditions of its own formation; that is, it is a living contributor to a living system.



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**Publications Produced as a Result of the Research**

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