Poignant Organizing as Metaphor
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Abstract
Poignant organizing is the process by which disparate elements or fragments come together in an elegant manner at the opportune time to create a fleeting or momentary whole (an episode) in the organization that changes the organization. This metaphor assumes that change is the heart of organizing, given our increasingly diverse, complex, and variable business and organizing world. I draw on the theories of Bakhtin (1919/1990), de Certeau (1984), and Weick (1976) to define how this movement of parts to wholes is beautiful or poignant, transformational and fleeting, and a-rational. I provide a rationale for the value of this metaphor, indicating possible lines of research based on this organizing perspective.

The essence of metaphor, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), is the "understanding and experience of one kind of thing in terms of another" (p. 5). Metaphors, according to these authors, govern our thoughts, structure our understandings, and thus provide for how we conceptualize and live our lives. In this manner, metaphors provide a means to name some process or event (often of one kind of experience) in ways that are typically unfamiliar and lead to novel and significant insights about that process or event. Cohen (1978) argues that a metaphor cultivates intimacy through its invitation, the acceptance by a listener of the metaphor, and the knowledge that this transaction creates an acknowledged community between the two parties participating in the conversation. Booth (1978) claims that metaphors convey more than what the words literally mean, this "more" he describes as "energy" (p. 52), with the caveat that this "more" is not easily captured nor described. Yet, this energy between the person putting forth the metaphor and the person engaging the metaphor is uniquely "more" than what would have been communicated otherwise. That is, metaphor offers us possibilities and nuances of meaning where before there were less. Poignant organizing as metaphor moves our understanding of organizing, typically a rationally viewed event, into understandings of organizing as beautiful or poignant, an unfamiliar means of structuring our discourse about organizing. My hope is that the following discussion provides a view of organizing that fosters an experience of intimacy and energy through providing alternative possibilities regarding our notions of organizing.

Poignant Organizing[1]

[A]n organization does what it does because of plans, intentional selection of means that get the organization to agree upon goals, and all of this is accomplished by such rationalized procedures as cost-benefit analyses, division of labor, specified areas of discretion, authority invested in the office, job descriptions, and a consistent evaluation and reward system. The only problem with that portrait is that is it rare in nature. People in organizations, including educational organizations, find themselves hard pressed either to find actual instances of those rational practices or to find rationalized

practices whose outcomes have been as beneficent as predicted, or to feel that those rational occasions explain much of what goes on within the organization. Parts of some organizations are heavily rationalized but many parts also prove intractable to analysis through rational assumptions. (Weick, 1976, p. 1)

Weick provides an image of organizing that is reflective of the organizing process in today's rapidly changing world. Organizations today are fluid, versatile, and changing. Handy (1997) describes today's organizing as a box of contracts, where people work out of their homes, even in different cities, on projects in another country, coordinated by others who have connections and reputations credible to the task. I agree with Handy's perspective and argue that we should no longer study organizations, but rather we should focus on organizing processes.

Hammer (1997) reflects this ontological move from organization to organizing with his apt description of the organizing setting, "Like it or not, security, stability, and continuity are out, because there simply isn't anyone on the scene who can provide them" (p. 28). Organizations must rapidly adjust and maintain flexibility to meet the demands of change. Arguably, because of all this change, we will need organizations to make sense of what is happening to address the ambiguity and variations of the workplace (Drucker, 1997).

The increasing force of globalization is a recognizable variation in this move to organizing. Harmon (1997) argues that at the heart of the global economy is a "constriction of time and space" (p. 244). Friedman (1999) also adds cost as an element that is constricted with globalization. Constriction of time, space, and cost means that speed becomes the new metric of organizing in the era of globalization. Friedman describes this metric as the "speed of commerce, travel, communication and innovation" (p. 9). Because speed is so prevalent, and because communication and innovation become so crucial, the organizational living of day-to-day life, the living and working scene, becomes uncertain.

Complicating this view of organizing is a sense of the sociality of organizing. Drucker (1997) argues that organizations are, "above all, social" (p. 5). The workplace is full of social relationships that are fleeting, temporary and "ad hoc" (p. 2). Relationships at work are transient, based on networks of connections, and depend on workers' reputations (Handy, 1997). No longer do organizations provide security for employees and in return no longer are employees committed to the organization (Hammer, 1997). The social contract between the organization and the employee is broken.

Loyalty and support are out, as is stability. Groups and teams also are affected by this new perspective of organizing. Somerville and Mroz (1997) suggest that corporate leaders have to make decisions "in a world where the pace and complexity of change have become nearly overwhelming, blurring accepted boundaries of time, geography, and language; of industries and markets; and of the public, private, and social sectors" (p. 65). These authors also suggest that the penultimate and forever regenerating organizing challenge "will be its [the organizing entity's] ability to continually recognize and develop the as-yet-unidentified competencies that our ever-changing world will demand" (pp. 77-78). The vital competency for organizing today is the ability to create and maintain "spontaneous forming and re-forming high-performing multidisciplinary teams in a rapidly transforming context" (p. 71). Handy (1997) concurs, "The new organizations are, in fact, always tending to be slightly out of control, their structures flexing, their people innovating" (p. 380).

My assumptions of organizing in the new millennium are apparent through my description of organizing above. I hold that the new metric for making sense of organizing is change. I also assume that employees influence the decision-making systems of organizations and that other companies (e.g., an organization's enemies or its competitors) are also impacting the decision-making and organizing processes. I view organizations as complex social processes that create and contribute to events where people influence and impact organizing through their communication and, in this manner, also affect the organizing process. Further, a logic of decision-making rationality, responsive to organizations, needs to be rethought in an effort to identify logics better suited to the dynamic fluidity of organizing.

Given the view of organizing today, 27 years after the publication of his classic 1976 work, Weick's ideas appear even more relevant to the study of organizing. Weick asks and arrives at some fundamental questions and statements regarding organizing that are germane to this discussion. In addition to addressing complexity and change in the organization, Weick questions the rational impulse in both our organizing sensemaking and organizing behaviors while also providing a means for moving beyond traditional rational perspectives. In the quote above he attempts to "develop a language for use in analyzing complex organizations, a language that may highlight features that have previously gone unnoticed" (p. 2). I argue that such features are other-than-rational, and like Weick, I argue that our preoccupation with rationality has worked to blind us to the unexpected in organizing. I dedicate this discussion to the theoretical framing of one selected a-rational event in organizing, a process I call poignant organizing.[2]

This discussion is an effort to make sense of the complexity, differing logics, and change in the workplace through the study of poignant organizing episodes (POEs). Poignant organizing is the process by which disparate elements or fragments come together in an elegant manner at the opportune time to create a fleeting or momentary whole (i.e., an episode) in the organization that changes the organization. I argue this process is a beautiful and a-rational event. I also argue that studying poignant organizing episodes allows researchers and practitioners to attend to the organizing process, allowing us to better understand organizing. Through understanding the organizing process, at least one aspect of it (i.e., POEs), subsequent scholars and practitioners may begin to take advantage of organizing events, in whatever forms available. Subsequently, this understanding may lead to an increase in scholars' and practitioners' ability to effectively impact organizing.

Traditionally, organizational scholars have examined organizing from a perspective emphasizing the rational (March & Simon, 1958/1993; Simon, 1945/1976). Those who have not taken a rational perspective (including Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972; Eisenberg, 1990; Pacanowsky, 1995; and Weick, 1976) have not examined organizing as poignant. Further, few have studied the a-rational aspects of organizing.

Poignant organizing can be more lucidly understood in view of the works of Bakhtin (1919/1990), de Certeau (1984), and Weick (1976). These theorists emphasize, capture, and identify the process of moving from fragments to wholes particularly well in their explication of aesthetics, tactics and metis, and loose coupling, respectively. They offer a precise theoretical view of this parts to whole process, and acknowledge the a-rational, which is something I have not been able to find elsewhere.

Vital to this theoretical description of poignant organizing is the idea that the poignant organizing process (i.e., moving from disparate parts to wholes) is beautiful, graceful, or elegant. "Poignant" is described in the New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (Brown, 1993) in the following manner, "of a weapon," "sharp-pointing," "piercing," (e.g., as if to the heart); but also as "delightfully piquant," "pleasantly pointed," and "stimulating to the mind or feelings" (p. 2266). Poignant is an apt description of organizing because it is an organizing process (it is piercing and goes directly to the heart, clearly indicating or cutting boundaries), and it is also a process that is stimulating, and delightful, full of beauty, grace, and elegance.

Both Bakhtin (1919/1990) and de Certeau (1984), whose works I draw upon theoretically, utilize the term "aesthetics" as descriptions of their theories. Following Williams (1976/1983), I argue that aesthetics, both for Bakhtin and de Certeau, has to do primarily with the senses and the sensuous perception of what is beautiful. Thus, the movement of parts to wholes for Bakhtin and de Certeau (see my description of his notion of metis below) has to do with what is considered or perceived to be beautiful, graceful, or elegant. Further, I argue that what is considered to be beautiful is subjective and a-rational (i.e., does not follow typical linear logical rationality). Thus, poignant organizing episodes are beautiful, graceful, or elegant processes - - poignant processes that clearly punctuate, demarcate, and organize peoples' lives in delightful, heartfelt, and beautiful ways.

Theoretical Moorings

Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel de Certeau, and Karl Weick are three theorists providing insight into the process of poignant organizing, although none uses this exact term. Bakhtin's (1919/1990) contributions are his ideas

on aesthetics: on the movement of parts to wholes as beautiful organizing process. de Certeau's (1984) relevant notions are his description of tactics and metis, both of which suggest potentialities of attaining the possible at particular moments and the transformative effects of such organizing moments/episodes. Weick (1976) creates the space, or the initial vocabulary, into which a study of a-rational organizing can move. I employ ideas from all three theorists as background because they usefully frame the poignant organizing phenomenon I am explicating.

Bakhtin

In his essay, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," Bakhtin (1919/1990) describes aesthetics using a number of different terms. The relevant ideas for my discussion include aesthetics, architectonics, the deed, outsideness, and consummation or finalizability. Bakhtin's ideas on aesthetics are important in this description of poignant organizing because of his emphases on beauty, the a-rational movement of fragments to wholes, communication, and on the day-to-day, fleeting, highly embodied and situated living process.

Aesthetics. Aesthetics for Bakhtin has to do with the relations among people and what is involved in becoming a whole person. In sum, aesthetics is a cover term for Bakhtin's interrelated notions of architectonics, the deed, outsideness, and consummation or finalizability. Holquist in his preface to Bakhtin's translated work (1919/1990) argues Bakhtin's aesthetics has to do with "how parts are shaped into wholes" (p. x). Bakhtin's (1919/1990) aesthetics relates to poignant organizing because of its illustrative role in accounting for the movement of unrelated and fragmented parts to completed wholes as an a-rational organizing process.

Architectonics. Architectonics has to do with relationships between people. Bakhtin's (1919/1990) focus is on the ethically obligated relationships between the self and others. Holquist, in his preface to Bakhtin (1919/1990), views architectonics as the study of how "entities relate to each other" (p. x). Architectonics is the "activity that describes how relationships between self and other, self and object, self and world are structured" (Haynes, 1995, p. 5). Holquist (1919/1990) describes this architectonic process as a problem that focuses on how selves "forge the kind of tentative wholeness we call a text out of the relation they articulate with their [others]" (p. x). The general process of architectonics is essential to poignant organizing because it is through our relations with others, our communicative processes, that organizing is produced and structured. Through these relations we are able to accomplish organizing and thus come to momentary wholeness. This wholeness is momentary, "never absolute" (Holquist, 1990), and relative. We find fulfillment only through the other.

The deed. The deed is the action(s) of the person(s) contributing to wholeness, or to poignant organizing, in a specific time and place (Bakhtin, 1919/1990). The deed brings focus upon the material aspects of living and on the particular moment in a distinctive time and location. The deed has a similar emphasis to that of tactics and metis below, in that they all function in a specific moment, in a particular and embodied time and space. The deed is essential to poignant organizing (as are tactics and metis) because it highlights the distinctly unique positioning of people in the organized/organizing space and how their own experiences and knowledges are drawn upon and utilized during this event/process.

Outsideness. Outsideness is a description of the relationship between the self and other where the self is in a position beyond or outside the other with respect to space, time, value, and meaning (Bakhtin, 1919/1990, p. 14). We are outside the other because we need to be. It is through the others outsideness (or our own outsideness to others, respectively) that we are positioned to more completely understand/see ourselves and the other(s) are positioned to fully see themselves. Our positioning outside the other allows us to recognize the details of the other. In this manner of being separate and outside the other, it is necessary for us to have diverse others around us. They provide us with aspects of ourselves that we would not see if we relied upon others more similar to us; but still, similar others will provide views of ourselves that we would not see because they remain outside of us. Outsideness is necessary in poignant organizing because it allows us to see the details we would not be able to see ourselves. Our ability to see the details that make up the whole allows for us to accomplish poignant organizing. When we are able to see these details we are able to move toward a momentary completeness or consummation (wholeness) via our relatedness with others.

Consummation/finalizability. The idea of consummation is that we are only able to move to a whole, a completed understanding or an organized situation, when we have the view of the other to complete us. With his idea of consummation, Bakhtin provides a sense of the momentary, the indeterminateness of moving from parts to whole, and a sense of a-rationality and beauty.

Thus, outsideness is a necessary condition in the move toward wholeness. We must interact with others to have completeness because it is through these others that we are able to make the connections that allow us to fulfill the whole. Vital to Bakhtin's notion of finalizability is that this completeness is only a momentary event. The whole is fleeting for Bakhtin (1919/1990); the complete moment does not last but forever must be made anew.

Beauty for Bakhtin (1919/1990) is an acknowledgement of the other, when we offer a momentary view of the other as we complete her/him. According to Bakhtin:

> Hence, any aesthetic existence, i.e., a whole, integral human being, is not founded and validated from within - from possible self-consciousness. And that is why beauty, insofar as we abstract from the author/contemplator's self-activity, appears to be passive, naive, and elemental. Beauty does not know itself; it cannot found and validate itself - it simply is. Beauty is a gift, a gift taken in abstraction from the bestower of the gift and his internally founded self-activity (for it is from within the gift-bestowing activity that this gift is founded and validated)(1919/1990, p. 91)

Beauty is an integral dimension of consummation, and therefore an integral component of the movement of parts to wholes, of organizing. For Bakhtin, this beauty is a gift, something that happens for the other but which does not come from within the others self. Thus, beauty in regard to poignant organizing comes about through the engagement of the self with the other, and it is only through the acknowledgement of the other that beauty is recognized. Further, because this beauty is part and parcel of consummation, because consummation is almost literally in the eye of the beholder (Holquist, 1990), the momentary part to whole completedness that is achieved comes from a particular point of view. This unique view is shared by no other, and the "eye of beauty," the point of view of beauty, is a premise setting position unlike all others. The unique view is a subjective one. In this different and non-shared position, as theorized by Bakhtin's idea of outsideness, we are able to see the movement of part to whole, to completedness, as a-rational because of the subjectivity inherent in this process. Through this consummation of self and other, and through the acknowledging of outsideness as they both work together, we may see how poignant organizing is a beautiful and a-rational process.

By utilizing Bakhtin as a theoretical mooring I illustrate the importance of communication, beauty, and a-rationality in organizing. Communication is socially situated and involves acknowledging the other, which I view as a condition of possibility for poignant organizing. Bakhtin's emphasis on beauty and a-rationality both occurring through consummation and the movement of disparate parts to wholes also illustrate the theoretical relatedness of his ideas to poignant organizing. Bakhtin's aesthetics provide a complementary perspective to de Certeau's (1984) emphasis on the moment and the material situatedness of the moment and to Weick's (1976) a-rational movement of parts to wholes.

de Certeau

de Certeau (1984) brings an emphasis on "the moment" to the poignant organizing process. de Certeau also provides insight into how this moment is transformative. This emphasizing of the moment and taking advantage of the moment is articulated in de Certeau's notions of tactics and metis.

Tactics. Tactics bring together different aspects within the organizing process to form a momentary whole. This coming together happens by circumstance and thoughtful awareness, something that is not planned or created with intention, but rather seems to happen serendipitously. For de Certeau (1984), tactics emerge out of a sense of "wit." He claims:

a tactic boldly juxtaposes diverse elements in order suddenly to produce a flash shedding a different light on the language of place and to strike the hearer. Cross-cuts, fragments, cracks and lucky hits in the framework of a system, consumers ways of operating are the practical equivalents of wit. (pp. 37-38)

For de Certeau, tactics speak to the importance of timing in accomplishing poignant organizing. Tactics are effective because of their focus on being in the right place at the right time. Timing allows for the accomplishing of meaning and for the fulfillment or value of this meaning at some specific time, which further allows for wholeness to be accomplished and for a restructuring of the event/organizing space/matrix of the people involved. de Certeau (1984) argues:

Tactics are procedures that gain validity in relation to the pertinence they lend to time - to the circumstances which the precise instant of an intervention transforms into a favorable situation, to the rapidity of the movements that change the organization of a space, to the relations among successive moments in actions, to the possible intersections of durations and heterogeneous rhythms, etc. (p. 38)

Metis. Metis is the second relevant idea of de Certeau (1984). Metis has three important dimensions. First, much like a tactic, metis is timely, occurring at the right time. Second, it is fluid, able to be flexible and take on many forms and identities. Third, metis is difficult to capture or explain, it is enraptured in what it does, "disappearing into its own action[so that] it has no image of itself" (p. 82). Defining this event/process of metis is difficult because of its fluidity, ability to change, how it morphs to the situation, and how it acts as a catalyst to impact the event/process. de Certeau asserts,

[Metis] constantly eludes attempts to define it, because it can be isolated neither from a conjuncture nor from an operation. It is a fact that cannot be detached from the "turn" or "trick" that produces it, because each time it is inserted in a sequence of elements, it distorts their relationships. (pp. 83-84)

Metis is also economical, allowing for much to be accomplished with little. Metis is "located" in people's memory and therefore does not take up space, but rather draws upon their vast resources of past experience and knowledge (de Certeau, 1984). The outcome of this economy is somewhat equivalent to the structure of many e-companies, such as Amazon.com. This company has few actual stores or warehouses (i.e., brick and mortar locations/spaces), but is accessible to many through the Internet (i.e., their/our memory). Companies such as Amazon.com are able to accomplish high sales with little overhead thus establishing strong business economies. de Certeau describes this economic aspect of metis as the "ultimate weapon," (p. 82) that functions to "obtain the maximum number of effects from the minimum force" (p. 82). de Certeau situates this power of metis under the heading of "the art of memory and circumstances," (p. 82) in which he refers to the notion of economy as a definition of aesthetics. Metis, then, and its main principle of economy speak to the beauty, grace, and elegance of poignant organizing.

Metis, again much like tactics, also functions to bring diverse elements together into a newly fashioned whole, which then produces change in the organizing space. An outcome of this component of metis, of bringing disparate elements into an organized whole, is that what is traditionally organized is altered and there is a newness or "foreignness" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 85) to the organizing space. This uniqueness, de Certeau claims, allows for change to occur. It is the "foreignness [that] makes possible a transgression of the law of the place" (p. 85). The previous order/organization is radically altered, thus, the outcome is a transformation in the organizing process.

Such transformation does not typically come about through planning. de Certeau (1984) describes metis as occurring in an almost haphazard manner. It happens from moment to moment, play to play, through which, in a particular instant, something happens whereby the detail is provided or encountered allowing for the wholeness to be recognized. Metis happens; it "is furnished by the conjuncture, that is, by external circumstances in which a sharp eye can see the new and favorable ensemble they will constitute, given one more detail" (p. 86). For de Certeau, this moment demands a certain talent, perhaps even grace; it demands

a sense of tactics and of art. de Certeau defines this moment as "the instant of art" (p. 86), wherein there is a provision of the detail with an outcome transforming the instant "into an unstable, makeshift harmony" (p. 86). I argue that a person's ability to see the (vital) detail creates the harmonious and fleeting whole that is the base, the condition of possibility, for poignant organizing. The key for both de Certeau and Bakhtin, in relation to creating a whole, is in the details and how these diverse details come into harmony or wholeness. Weick (1976) also examines how parts become wholes, focusing on a-rational organizing processes.

Weick

Weick (1976), writing about educational organizations in particular, claims to examine those aspects of organizations that "prove intractable to analysis through rational assumptions" (p. 2). Weick contributes the idea of loose coupling to this discussion on a-rational organizing. Loose coupling is the idea that events within and across systems are "responsive, but that each event also preserves its own identity and some evidence of its physical separateness" (p. 3). Weick's definition of loose coupling has five facets.

First, the parts involved in loose coupling maintain their own identity. Loose coupling "highlights the identity and separateness of elements that are momentarily attached" (Weick, 1976, p. 4) so that the investigator clearly specifies "the identity, separateness and boundaries of the elements coupled" (p. 4). Loose coupling provides "evidence of a physical or logical separateness" (p. 3) between coupled elements. This separateness further demarcates the identity of the parts being coupled. Second, because of this separateness, loose coupling has an "impermanence, dissolvability, and tacitness" (p. 3) associated with it. Third, these aspects of loose coupling provide the cohesion for the organization, or elements of the organization to stay together. This cohesion is maintained through allowing play or responsiveness between elements in the system (so that the entire organization does not have to change). Fourth, according to Glassman (1973), the amount of coupling between two systems is dependent on the number of shared variables between the systems. The more shared variables, the more interdependent the systems, and thus, the more coupled are the systems. Fifth, and finally, loose coupling is based on a metaphor of building blocks, where a block may be attached to the system or disjoined from it without major disturbance to the system. In this manner, Weick argues, loose coupling allows researchers to attend to the complexity of systems.[3] Researchers adopting this orientation of loosely coupled systems view systems as stable (Weick, 1976) and assume that loosely coupled systems persevere across time.

Weick (1976) is vital to the theoretical background of poignant organizing because he provides an initial vocabulary and a historical precedent for examining both a-rational and complex aspects of organizing. Weick also demarcates how a-rational elements may work within a system, through his metaphor of building blocks, which begins to capture how parts are in relation to the whole. Finally, Weick articulates the value of undertaking the study of how fragments move to aggregation and how this loose coupling is a base of organizing processes.

Poignant organizing is different from loose coupling, however, because loose coupling assumes stability within a whole system wherein the logic of the system remains basically the same. By contrast, poignant organizing is based on the assumption of change in and across systems. My assumptions about organizing include the idea that organizing entities have alternative and disruptive logics that make systemic logic more problematic. In a systems theory view the system is the whole; in a poignant organizing view the whole is not the system. The whole cannot be the system because there are competing, disruptive, and divergent logics and pressures affecting a system. The metric of system theory seems to be stability and sameness, whereas the metric of poignant organizing is change and difference. I also hold that poignant organizing is transformative in the given context whereas loose coupling maintains the logic of the system (through the system's adaptation to changes from outside the system, thus the importance of being loosely coupled). When differing logics impact a system there will be a necessity of significant change to the system. I argue this change, coming from variant logics, necessitates that the system undergo more than only a joining or disjoining of the system. Rather, serious adjustment in the system is required. Thus, I propose poignant organizing is transformative to the logic of the system.

Theoretical Positioning

Placing these theorists' ideas beside, against, and across each other creates a focus on what I view as one vital process of the many processes of organizing, what I have termed poignant organizing. Bakhtin (1919/1990) provides insight into how fragments come together in the moment for a complete whole. Bakhtin also moves from a social and ethical position emphasizing communication, diversity, beauty, and a-rationality in organizing. de Certeau (1984) highlights the momentary situatedness and timeliness of the organizing process as well as the bringing together of diverse fragments which transform the whole and the process. Weick (1976) allows me to begin to address complexity and a-rationality in organizing, as well as momentary wholeness through his ideas of loose coupling.

I want to highlight that not all part to whole organizing is beautiful. For instance, parts to whole organizing may happen without any aspect of beauty. The organizing may merely happen or be there, as with loose coupling, which I view as an instance of organizing from parts to wholes that neither exemplifies beauty nor lacks it. There may also be part to whole organizing that greatly lacks beauty, such as revolution (but even such a view of revolution is subjectively positioned).

The process of moving from disparate parts to momentary wholes that I am examining, poignant organizing, is beautiful or graceful. Both Bakhtin (1919/1990) and de Certeau (1984) theorize this part to whole process as profoundly aesthetic. Bakhtin's view is aesthetic because of his valuing of the other that comes about through a specific and fleeting moment in which parts move to a whole. The differences of the other, as they are perceived by the self (the beholder of the others uniqueness or beauty) and communicated back to the other by the self (an event involving the deed, outsideness, and consummation/finalizability), provide a momentary whole, an organized view, of the other. This event is fundamentally an aesthetic one for Bakhtin because this process provides an embracing of the others difference (of beauty). This embracing act is one of respect and is possible because of our embodied position situated in particular moments.

de Certeau's (1984) theorizing is also aesthetic. His discussion of metis, and its idea of economy, of accomplishing much with little, is aesthetic in regard to efficiency. I also argue this process is an aesthetic one because of metis' ability to change itself and the event and due to the need to recognize the details necessary to make a change that is significant to the system.

Weick (1976) provides a view of organizing that is not aesthetic, rather he articulates the value of taking an a-rational approach to organizing. Thus, Weick's contribution to my discussion is that he sets a precedent for examining the a-rational in organizing and views this a-rational process in terms of parts coming to a whole, or loose coupling.

I have drawn from Bakhtin's (1919/1990) notions of aesthetics, de Certeau's (1984) ideas of tactics and metis, and Weick's (1967) ideas on loose coupling to argue that a poignant organizing episode is a novel and useful metaphor for examining the process of organizing. Poignant organizing is an alternative, a-rational organizing process through which disparate fragments come together at the opportune time to accomplish a whole, an episode, that has a transformative effect on the organizing process, a process that is experienced by participants as beautiful or graceful.

Rational Approaches to Organizing

Scholars have typically examined organizing from a perspective emphasizing a rational approach (e.g., March & Simon, 1958/1993; Simon, 1945/1976). Simon (1945/1976) specifically defines rationality in the workplace. In describing the "correctness" of a decision, Simon asserts that a decision is correct "if it selects the appropriate means to reach designated ends" (p. 61). Beginning his chapter, entitled "Rationality in Administrative Behavior" (p. 61), Simon argues that:

> [s]ince "good" administration is behavior that is realistically adapted to its ends, just as "good" business is economic behavior accurately calculated to realize gain, a theory of administrative decisions will of necessity be somewhat preoccupied with the rational

aspects of choice. (p. 62)

I want to highlight Simon's view of the rational. What counts as rational are those actions that realistically bring the organization, and hence the individual and group, to its desired and designated ends.

However, Simon (1945/1976) is careful not to assert that humans "are always or generally rational" (p. 61). He argues that such a sweeping orientation has been refuted and that he is focusing on how "good administrators decide" (p. 62). For Simon, the good administrator's rational decision-making process first requires the "comparison of alternative means in terms of the respective ends to which they will lead" (p. 65). Good administrators acknowledge a second limitation of rationality, that there are other consequences or other ends that may come out of the means initiated for the desired end(s). A third limitation of rationality has to do with time. Good administrators recognize that only one choice can be made in a given amount of time. These limitations, and the attendant possibilities created from these limitations, must be recognized in decision-making practices. Simon suggests that we are objectively rational only in "segments" (p. 81) or brief moments in our actual behavior. Surrounding these segments of objective rationality are the moments of our limited rationality, which have come to be known in the literature as rationality that is bounded.

Bounded rationality, how human rationality falls short of objective rationality in persons' acted behaviors, has three components. First, as actors we do not have a complete knowledge of the consequences of our choices. Second, because of our lack of knowledge, we must supply, rely upon, and create and attach value to our perceived consequences in order to evaluate them. Third, we must make a choice among the possible alternatives that we are able to generate (Simon, 1945/1976).

Given our bounded rational state of being we are left to make choices without enough information and without knowing the consequences of our choices. In effect, we "satisfice" (Simon, 1945/1976, p. xxix). Satisficing is when people find a solution to a problem that is satisfactory in some manner to a portion of the problem. They find "a course of action that is satisfactory or "good enough'" (p. xxix) for the situation as they understand it. Perrow (1986) provides a clear definition of satisficing. For him, problem solving involves conducting,

> a limited search for alternatives along familiar and well worn paths, selecting the first
> satisfactory one [solution] that comes along. [People] do not examine all possible
> alternatives, nor do they keep searching for the optimum one. Rather, they satisfice, or
> select the first satisfactory solution. Their very standards for satisfactory solutions are a
> part of the definition of the situation. (p. 122)

Our satisficing that we enact as boundedly rational people occurs within a specific context. In Simon's (1945/1976) *Administrative Behavior* the context is the organization. Simon argues, "The task of administration is so to design this environment that the individual will approach as close as practicable to rationality (as judged in terms of the organization's goals) in his [sic] decisions" (p. 241).

Perrow's (1986) critique of bounded rationality is that it maintains the means-ends emphasis of objective reality and that the evaluative criteria of the ends is presumed, directed, or organized by the organization. As such, organizations are creators and sustainers of the(ir) dominant ideology. Along with his critique, Perrow applauds bounded rationality. He praises bounded rationality because he views bounded rationality as enabling hierarchical structure. It is this structuring that allows for or offers the condition of possibility for "occasional resistance and subtle changes by the controlled" (p. 123). For instance, Perrow argues that bounded rationality "creates a great deal of change for it permits unexpected interactions, new discoveries, serendipities, and new goals and values" (p. 123) through the structuring. Viewed from Perrow's perspective, bounded rationality is the state of existence for organizing, which has (at least) two outcomes: 1) reinforcing the status quo of organizational premises, and 2) providing unexpected interactions, new discoveries, and serendipities within organizations. I argue that poignant organizing should provide insight into these interactions, discoveries, and serendipities as they contribute to the movement of parts to wholes in organizing.

In addition to providing a grounding definition of the rational, Simon (1945/1976) illustrates the importance of the organization in ordering and organizing the goals of the members of the organization. Simon also is instructive in his definitions of bounded rationality and satisficing, both ideas encourage a more specific and clear understanding of rationality and a-rationality in the workplace.

Following Perrow's (1986) critique of Simon, I argue that Simon (1945/1976) views the organization as framing the decision and everyday interaction premises for the members of the organization, and as such, this premise setting enables action or work to be accomplished. My critique of this process is that the organization is no longer the only influential premise maker within the organization for organizing members. Rather, I argue there are multiple influences and multiple sites attempting to establish premises upon organizing members, and in turn, there are multiple opportunities for change. Because of these contesting processes, there is a greater possibility for the dislocation and subsequent chance of increased transformational organizing novelties or for "unexpected interactions, new discoveries, serendipities, and new goals and values" (Perrow, 1986, p. 123). I view these increased chances as fragments that become enacted possibility by the movement to wholes that occur at the opportune time. Poignant organizing attempts to articulate the process attendant to the multiplicity of premises and sites associated with the event of organizing and how these multiplicities are momentarily aggregated into a whole.

March and Simon (1958/1993) argue that organizations are structured and they function because of the human ability to solve problems and because of rational choice. Rational choice is limited in relation to the complexity of problems, so complex problems need to be addressed through "simplified models that capture the main features of a problem without capturing all its complexities" (p. 190). March and Simon label this capturing of main features "a one-thing-at-a-time" approach (p. 191). They argue that this mode of taking and focusing on one thing at a time is fundamental to the structuring process in organizing and that it structures the organization and makes it stable.

Poignant organizing may be viewed as analogous to March and Simon's (1958/1993) views of the organization in that both suggest that people need to have behaviors that take advantage of the moment (poignant organizing perspective) or are adaptive (March and Simons perspective). But the difference is that March and Simon view organizations as more stable whereas I view organizing as rapidly changing processes. Where these views diverge is in regard to assumptions of rationality.

March and Simon (1958/1993) assert,

> If behavior in organizations is intendedly rational, [boundedly rational] we will expect aspects of the behavior to be relatively stable that either (a) represent adaptations to relatively stable elements in the environment, or (b) are the learning programs that govern the process of adaptation. (p. 191)

They claim there is a need for stability of procedures and regulations for the organization to adapt to changes and accomplish its goals. They later argue that "If there were not boundaries to rationality, or if the boundaries varied in a rapid and unpredictable manner, there could be no stable organization structure" (p. 192). Again, the differences between poignant organizing and March and Simons views of the organization is one of scale and speed. March and Simon argue for a more consistent world in which stable procedures allow the organization to adapt. I argue that the world is operating within a metric of change and diversity rather than stability and consistency and that change is part of the procedures and structures of our organizing. I also argue that rationality does not adequately nor completely capture the rapidity of change in today's organizing world.

A-rational Approaches to Organizing

Some scholars have moved away from a rational perspective to one that is more a-rational (e.g., Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972; Eisenberg, 1990; Pacanowsky, 1995; Weick, 1976). Moving toward an a-rational view of organizing, Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) offer their article, A garbage can model of organizational choice. These authors view organizing as an anarchistic [4] process, whereby there are three

organizing characteristics: problematic preferences, unclear technology, and fluid participation. Problematic preferences means that organizations are a "loose collection of ideas rather than [a] coherent structure[s]" (p. 1). Unclear technology indicates that the processes of the organization "are not understood by its members" (p. 1). Fluid participation by organizational members is described much like it appears, "participants vary in the amount of time and effort they devote to different domains" (p. 1) within their lives. Cohen et al. question themselves as to whether, through their model, they "[c]an provide some meaning for intelligence which does not depend on relating current action to known goals?" (p. 2). This question critically addresses Simon's (1945/1976) definition of rationality above, which focuses on how best to move to known goals.

Cohen et al. (1972) also state that "organizations provide sets of procedures through which participants arrive at an interpretation of what they are doing and what they have done while in the process of doing it" (p. 2). While attempting to move away from Simon's (1945/1976) definition of rationality via a critique of it, they still subscribe to the assumption that the organization sets the decision premises for organizational members and organizational processes. In this manner, they are continuing to subscribe to a rational view of organizing because the organization already has defined what the goals are for its members. Cohen et al. (1972) argue "from this [garbage can model] point of view, an organization is a collection of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer, and decision makers looking for work" (p. 2). Given this description of Cohen et al.'s garbage can process, it is important to note that the "choices looking for problems" in the organization, the "solutions looking for issues," and the "decision makers looking for work,"(p. 2) all happen under the umbrella of the premise(s) established by the organization. Thus, this garbage can model is still rational because the choices, issues and feelings, and decision makers are all influenced by the goal(s) of the organization.

I argue that in organizations today this primary organizational premise is but one of many competing premises that attempt to fix or fashion organizing processes. Also of importance is that these processes today are not only decision-making processes but rather are a multitude of processes (e.g., social relating processes, playful processes, resistant processes, etc.). I argue it is these processes, both rational and a-rational, that are moving from fragments to wholes in the daily organizing process.

A relevant comment about the garbage can model is that Cohen et al. (1972) do not view the garbage can process as being dominated by intention. Their view on intention is important because it acknowledges the importance of chance, non-determinedness, or non-agency of people as they go about the organizing process. This move away from intention begins to acknowledge other concerns of agency that impact organizing.

A final relevant comment and critique is that the conceptualization of the garbage can model is not very precise in its formulation and explanation of process. Cohen et al. (1972) begin to examine complexity in organizing, and the metaphor of a garbage can is useful in framing the messiness associated with complexity; however, the model is lacking in terms of explaining how the process happens. By examining the poignant organizing process of moving from parts to wholes I hope to capture more precisely the idea of process in organizing.

Pacanowsky (1995) offers another dimension of a-rationality to this discussion. He introduces the idea of wicked problems. Wicked problems are problems that do not have a known means for solving them. People are not rational in solving these problems because defining the problem is difficult and it does not allow for typical rational problem solving approaches. A different approach is necessary because the problem is multidimensional and is itself changing. A wicked problem is not rational because the steps needed to address the problem (i.e., the means to the end) are not available to the people working on the problem and thus they are unable to define the problem. Wicked problems are "non-linear" (p. 38). This is to say that the typical reflective thinking model where problem solvers 1) define the problem, 2) generate solutions, 3) specify criteria for the solutions, 4) apply the criteria to the solutions and select the best solution, 5) implement the solution, and 6) seek feedback on the solution (Dewey, 1910/1991) is inadequate for the task of addressing wicked problems. Pacanowsky argues that there are no known "algorithms" (p. 37) for wicked problem solving, and what must be done is that problem solvers need to "think outside the box" (p. 37) and engage in an iterative "dialogue" (p. 37) with the problem. Another way of talking about

wicked problems is that they are unsolvable or less than solvable when examining them from the (dominant) premises of the organization.[5] Dialogue allows problem solvers to cycle through a problem until the problem is addressed in a useful manner. Paconowsky argues that wicked problems are not solved, rather they are designed around. That is to say that something is done about the problem that allows it to be addressed but the details are left to be worked out in further iterations of the problem.

The ambiguity associated with wicked problems and the unknown value emerging from solving wicked problems appears relevant to the transformative process of moving from parts to wholes that I conceptualize as poignant organizing. Reminiscent of Perrow's (1986) view that there are serendipities and new discoveries in organizations, Pacanowsky's conception of possible, but unknown, achievement of value may be seen to occur when the parts are fashioned into a whole. The fashioning of these parts into wholes is an iterative, ambiguous process and may be seen as similar to de Certeau's (1984) notion of metis in that metis changes depending on what is happening in the given situation. This wicked problem solving process appears to reflect or to move within the same forms, meaning schedules, or orientations[6] as does the a-rational process of poignant organizing.

Pacanowsky (1995) argues that addressing wicked problems adds value to the organization. However, he believes that this value is unclear until it is achieved. Once information is utilized in a manner to design a solution to a wicked problem then the value may be ascertained, but only after the iterative process is engaged. The uncertainty in determining value is important in that it speaks to the context of the wicked problem and our ability to survive in an increasingly competitive business environment. Context is vital because of its informational value on the iterative process in solving wicked problems.

While poignant organizing and wicked problems appear to have many similarities (e.g., focusing on complexity and change, taking an a-rational approach, having an unknown value of solutions until they are enacted, and utilizing a social communicative approach) there also appear to be important differences. The first difference is that Pacanowsky (1995) does not provide an in-depth theoretical background for how we may address complexity and change in the workplace.[7] The second and more important distinction between wicked problems and poignant organizing episodes is that I assume poignant organizing episodes happen more generally in the organizing process and not only in regard to solving problems. This difference of assumptions about organizing may have vital implications for organizing.

Eisenberg (1990) also adds to this discussion of a-rationality with his notion of jamming. Jamming is a process in which people experience "fluid behavioral coordination unhindered by expectations for self-revelation" (p. 146). Eisenberg focuses on the lack of self-revelation or on minimally disclosive relationships in organizing processes. People experience jamming in highly rule-governed and structured activity where there is little need for increased self-disclosure. Jamming has four characteristics: 1) it is transcendent (i.e., allowing people to feel like they belong without revealing a great deal of personal information); 2) it embraces diversity; 3) it is fragile (i.e., it is unusual and rare); and 4) it may be risky. Further, jamming necessitates four conditions, which are not sufficient in and of themselves, but are necessary. These four conditions include: 1) skill or having the ability necessary to participate in the event in which jamming occurs; 2) structure or a "core set of rules and roles" (p. 155), which allow for improvisation; 3) a setting or context of non-normal life; and 4) a surrender to the jamming experience involving a lack of self-consciousness. Along with these four conditions, Eisenberg argues that jamming also requires a sense of grace or luck. His statement here is cryptic without further elaboration. I imagine such grace or luck as having dimensions of wit, beauty, or elegance, and thus poignancy.

Eisenberg (1990) provides an instance of an organizing event that is also a-rational. He highlights the necessity of an artistic, beautiful, or graceful a-rational form for jamming to happen. This aspect of grace is vital because it indicates a clearly alternative model to rational approaches to organizing. Two other important elements of jamming include the improvisational quality of the event and how jamming is located in a social view of communication, where communication is accomplished through shared meaning between people. A final element has to do with how jamming works within the organizational structure. Jamming appears to be informed by organizational premises (organizational structurings), but the transcendent and improvisational nature of jamming may be seen as a move beyond any organizational premises. With this transcendent move the rules for jamming or its criteria do not appear as structured or structuring; participants may have different rules by which they are jamming or playing.

This idea of different rules points to the embracing of diversity that appears to be a similarity of both poignant organizing and jamming. Other similarities of jamming and poignant organizing are that both appear a-rational, fluid, and possibly fragile or rare. Poignant organizing appears distinct from jamming because, at first glance, it does not center on being minimally disclosive. This metaphor of poignant organizing also attempts to position poignant organizing as occurring in or through talk, something Eisenberg (1990) does not elucidate in his article.

Thus far, I have provided a definition of what is considered "rational" as offered by Simon (1945/1976), which is doing what is necessary to meet the organization's desired goals. I also have illustrated how the desired goals have been incorporated or presumed to be that of the organization, demonstrating an ideology of rationality in the organization. Along with this type of rationality, I have begun to show how different scholars have moved beyond rationality to incorporate a-rational ideas into the organizing process. These scholars include Cohen et al. (1972), Pacanowsky (1995), and Eisenberg (1990). Cohen et al. (1972) contribute to this perspective through their efforts at addressing a-rationality and complexity in the organizing process. Pacanowsky's (1995) contribution is his emphasis on wicked problems that are not defined within the organization and how organizational scholars need to examine how influences beyond the organization influence the organizing process. These outside influences indicate that the organization does not always and finally presume the goals of its individual members. Eisenberg (1990) is vital because of his emphasis on form and his acknowledgment of the improvisational and momentary aspects of organizing. Through this review I indicate the need for further examination of the a-rational in organizations and in particular the need to build a vocabulary and a research program that continues to develop the vocabulary of a-rationality. I also suggest that scholars and practitioners need to focus on the elements that impact organizing, both "inside" and "outside" of the organization given our increasingly small and global/technologically dominated organizing worlds. Further, I hold that we need to examine the more fluid, artistic, and beautiful forms of organizing, a move that Eisenberg begins to capture and articulate. The metaphor of poignant organizing may address at least some of the limitations discussed earlier by considering another a-rational possibility: poignant organizing episodes.

Rationale and Directions for Future Research

Given the definition of poignant organizing above and the emphasis on the rational in the organizational literature, why study poignant organizing episodes? What will poignant organizing episodes contribute to our study of communication, and more specifically, organizational/organizing communication? Why is studying poignant organizing episodes a useful and worthwhile undertaking? First, this metaphor is important because it may offer insight into the processes necessary for organizational members' participation in an increasingly diverse, global and technical world. Poignant organizing episodes may inform our understanding of the effects of an increasingly smaller and information dependent world where "speed" (Friedman, 1999) is of necessity. This navigation of the multiplicity of information in organizing may be more effectively guided through fragmented moments incorporating multiple bits of information into a whole. Poignant organizing may inform us regarding how people are able to navigate within and through this global technological world of continual, fragmented change.

Innovation is yet another area in which poignant organizing holds potential. The study of poignant organizing episodes may inform our understanding of and increase our abilities to innovate, especially because poignant organizing episodes may demonstrate how people adjust to novel situations due to the use of diverse fragments that move to a transformative whole. Innovation, for Albrecht and Ropp (1984), is an outcome of the complex interpersonal relationships of members within a system or network. Albrecht and Ropp argue that the more connected or integrated a person is within numerous networks, the greater the ability of the organization to be innovative. Kanter (1982) claims that the more an organizational culture has collaboration, teamwork, and structures that encourage people to "do what needs to be done" (p. 96) to accomplish the job, then the organization will be more innovative. Managers who are conscious of the necessary conditions for facilitating innovation will also help the organization be more innovative. Further, Kanter argues innovation occurs where there are overlapping territories, organizational members with multiple contacts, free flowing information, budgetary excess, and future oriented reward systems. Henderson (1994) claims the best innovative managers "constantly challenge the company's conventional wisdom and stimulate the dynamic exchange of ideas" (p. 102).

Given these aspects of innovation within organizing life, poignant organizing episodes may provide insight into the innovative process. Specifically, in regard to creating connections with others in networks (Albrecht & Ropp, 1984) and having free flowing information within the organization (Kanter, 1982), poignant organizing episodes may offer insight into and encourage these processes. Poignant organizing episodes may build or create connections among people, and these people may have moments of deeper understanding of an innovation. Poignant organizing episodes may offer insight into the structuring aspects of our communication in ways that may contribute to innovation at a structural level due to this possibility of deeper understanding. Poignant organizing episodes also may stimulate the exchange of ideas into new and entirely unthought forms, possibly making our organizing more dynamic (Henderson, 1994). Finally, to the extent innovation is regarded as a creative or inventive process (Wilson, 1966), poignant organizing episodes may increase our understanding of innovation as well as provide insight into our abilities to enact innovation.

Poignant organizing episodes also may be insightful in the process of the diffusion of innovations. Diffusion is defined as how an innovation is communicated among members of a social system over time (Rogers, 1995). A vital part of diffusion is that the idea being diffused, the innovation, is new and there is also some uncertainty associated with the innovation. The newness and uncertainty may be impacted by poignant organizing episodes in that they may allow new information to more easily be translated over the system. This facile translation may happen because of the theorized spontaneity and cross-cutting ability of poignant organizing. It may be that poignant organizing episodes allow innovations to be more easily diffused because of this spontaneity that alters the system thus allowing the new idea to be accepted.

The largest advantage poignant organizing may afford to the process of diffusion is through the possibility that poignant organizing episodes may bring heterogeneous participants together in a manner that will allow for the innovation to spread. Rogers (1995) describes heterophilious participants, or people with different attributes, as one of the distinctive problems of any diffusion. These differences are problematic because diverse people are typically less likely to communicate and when they do, they "do not speak the same language" (p. 19). Poignant organizing episodes may address this problem of heterophilia by recognizing the value of bringing together the orientations of disparate people and encouraging them to speak in ways that allow diffusion.

Poignant organizing also may demonstrate insight into the a-rational processes that are an integral part of our organizing; as such they may offer another valid account of our communicative processes. This insight potentially could allow us to re-position and examine the desire to view organizing as rational. Exploring poignant organizing may allow for heuristic approaches to organizing that until now have been disregarded, for the most part.

The final reason for studying poignant organizing episodes is that they are poignant. Without providing any rational justification, without citing a list of scholars in any tradition who have focused on examining the beautiful and providing its organizing benefits, without even making some sort of appeal that poignant organizing is "heuristic" or germane, what is poignant in our communication should be studied merely because it is so. A commitment to studying what is poignant in our organizing, which is at the heart of this metaphor, begins with a belief in the beautiful and that we should study it because beauty exists in our communication, that it is important, valid, reasonable, and consequential in and of itself. This beauty in and of itself serves as "reason" enough to study poignant organizing.

Evaluating Poignant Organizing

In evaluating which metaphors are better than others, Booth (1978) claims metaphors should be 1) active (i.e., provide animation to whatever is less so); 2) concise (i.e., say more with less); 3) appropriate to grandeur or triviality depending on the context of use (in this case moving toward grandeur); 4) properly accommodated to the audience; and 5) directed toward building an ethos for the speaker/writer (i.e., create a character to be trusted - or in this case provide a view of someone who may provide insight into the organizing process). I believe the metaphor/theory of poignant organizing meets these criteria. Booth also argues that metaphors, and more directly those people creating metaphors, also create culture, and that the

quality of this culture is vital. In a similar act Deetz (1986) asks: "Which metaphors tend to enhance the presentation of alternative positions, and thus enhance change and adaption, and which do not?" (p. 181). Poignant organizing seems a quality metaphor, one that impacts our organizing discourse. My intent is that by focusing on alternative positions of a-rationality and beauty, while also providing possible insight into processes of change, innovation, and diffusion within organizing processes, our understandings of organizing are increased.

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Endnotes

[1] This work is based on the Ph.D. dissertation of the author, Leslie A. Baxter and Randy Y. Hirokawa co-dissertation advisors. A previous version was presented at the April 2000 Southern States Communication Association meeting in Lexington, Kentucky.

[2] I thank Dr. Sue DeWine for her suggestion of the term poignant to describe this process of organizing.

[3] But see Perrow (1999) for a critique of complex systems in which he suggests that in very complex systems we may not know or be able to grasp the system in its entirety, and by implication we may attend to the system in an inaccurate manner when something unexpected happens in the system. Perrow suggests that complex systems out-complexify our understanding of them, especially when they are tightly coupled.

[4] I wish to highlight the connotation of anarchistic organizing and the authors' later description of their model as appearing pathological (p. 16). The authors conclude that the garbage can model is appropriate for when rational models are not useful. Traditionally, there is an emphasis or bias in the literature that tends to move against anything that is a-rational. I believe we continue to struggle against this negative view of the a-rational, and at least part of this metaphor is directed at valuing the a-rational and finding it beautiful.

[5] Pacanowsky (1995) argues that organizing members may be trained to think non-linearly or a-rationally. This training is an

important finding related to poignant organizing because it suggests that poignant organizing may be something we can learn about and utilize to our advantage.

[6] I use the language forms, meaning schedules, and orientations to indicate the necessary and changing iterative process of solving wicked problems and what I am theorizing as the process of poignant organizing.

[7] However, this omission may certainly be due to the audience of his article and the applied orientation.