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The Politics of Mediation: Colonization to Co-Generative Democracy

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This chapter represents a big picture discussion providing the context for the many more micro studies and interventions that I, and others, often do. It is intended as a reminder of how the pieces might fit together and guidance for the choices we all make. The chapter is first and foremost about the reformation of democracy in light of a sophisticated understanding of mediation processes, the sites where mediation and decisions occur, and the practical inclusive interventions possible in these sites. The discussion here grows out of the widespread observation that we are not creating the future we could mutually choose. I believe this is the case because most often we are doing the wrong kind of democracy in the wrong places, thus endlessly (at best) applying band-aids rather than reinventing.

My career goal has been to design new processes of human interaction and systems of governance and decision-making enhancing the ability of people to thrive in conditions characterized by fast rapid change, high degrees of pluralism and interdependency as well as highly mediated (and sponsored) human experience. The best interaction designs enable human ‘difference’ and ‘otherness’ to contest unwitting consent and otherwise dominate positions producing choices that are creative and customized to local circumstances fostering high degrees of constituent commitment and voluntary compliance (Deetz 2017). Without this, we and other species will at best merely survive the conflicts set in play by expected social and ecological changes. To thrive rather than just survive, a reformation of democracy advancing these new interaction designs and practices is needed. Core to that is an understanding of, and interventions in, the politics of mediation, which I will focus on in this chapter.

A simple representation of mediation appeared in a cartoon some years ago. It shows a child on a beach with a joystick guiding a robot who is flying a kite. From

1 the child's point of view the goal is mastery of the kite, a mastery that requires a
 2 certain disappearance or transparency of the eyes, arms, hands, controller, robot
 3 and string as well as a 'direct' responsiveness to the environment of the kite. The
 4 child lives control. My interest, like that of many today, is in escaping such inno-
 5 cence, and to attend to the situation differently. Contemporary theory tells us that
 6 the desire to fly a kite, the kite, the trip to the beach and the robot are all human
 7 products, bought and sold, sponsored by someone. Each has a history, each is
 8 enabling and constraining, each was produced under conditions of inequality, and
 9 the invisibility and felt transparency inhibit understanding this. The outcome of
 10 mastery is also unwitting servitude. Accepting the child's experience as theirs and
 11 as privileged is the foundation of liberal democracy and its ultimate flaw. My goal
 12 is to not simply accept the sometimes arrogance and elitism of cultural studies and
 13 blanket condemnation of neo-liberalism; it is to engage in the world aided by a
 14 conceptual understanding presented here as 'politically attentive relational con-
 15 structionism' (PARC) and additionally to provide guidance for productive inter-
 16 vention. To do this without arrogance is to describe a co-generative democracy as
 17 an open and endlessly contested directive of interventions in social life.

21 *Politically Attentive Relational Constructionism*

22
 23 Since I have developed politically attentive relational constructionism (PARC)
 24 detail in other places (Deetz 2014, 2017; Deetz and Eger 2014) and much of
 25 this is familiar in the larger critical cultural work, allow me to begin with a very
 26 quick overview of the philosophy underlying my work and begin with a rela-
 27 tional ontology. Experience itself arises out of a coupled relationship of a way
 28 of attending to the world and a world that is attended to. This is an unavoid-
 29 able irreversible coupling of the 'attending to' (a movement toward) and a not-
 30 yet-determined 'attended to'. Objects and subjects do not exist apart from this
 31 coupled relationship except in abstraction. The 'intending to' is usually called
 32 'positionality'. Positionality includes our body, our corporal way of being; it
 33 includes our specific sense equipment and it is extended in our various tools, instru-
 34 ments, organizational forms and vocabularies. All these direct a way of being in
 35 touch with a not-yet-determined world.

36 Positionality is an interpellation, calling, recruiting into a produced self and
 37 engagement (Weedon 1987). As real human beings, we are recruited into positions
 38 that are possible and made possible by the materiality of the worlds in which we
 39 are placed, by the bodies we inherit and so forth. Each way of being positioned
 40 makes claims about a world and makes claims on us in that world. Possible social

1 positionalities become institutionalized instruments, policies, checklists and rou-
2 tine responses in language and so on, and they are largely invisible and taken for
3 granted, thus producing a kind of common sense. Such a concept reminds us that
4 attention always precedes perception, and that attention is always political even
5 if unknowingly so.

6 Relational constructionism shows that produced experience always arises in
7 a tension between the way of encountering and the encountered. Neither is pri-
8 mary in open production. The indeterminate outside is as active as positionality.
9 Recovering indeterminacy, allowing otherness to overcome subject-dominated
10 construction, is the first critical principle. A fixed subject or a presumed fixed object
11 of experience are each a suppression of the conflict of first production.

12 Thus, our analytic should help us be attentive to the politics of relational
13 production (the preferences of some positionalities over others), the politics of
14 reproduction (rendering the conflict in production invisible) and the politics of
15 consequences (the material advantage of this construction over others for specific
16 populations).

17 Constructions are laden with specific values providing affordances and, by
18 design, advantaging some choices over others and some people over others. Con-
19 struction takes place under specific conditions of power. Therefore, sophisticated
20 theories of power are needed to describe not only visible power relations, but the
21 ways in which advantage is embedded in constructions. The myths of objectivity
22 (naturalism) hide the value system embedded in institutionalized positionality and
23 the multiple ways that values enter into social productions and decision-making.

24 The PARC analytic goes a step further than most in the analysis of construc-
25 tions. PARC helps in showing not just that constructionism exists, but what is
26 being constructed. Experience is seen as composed of six productions, or in other
27 words, positionality is put in relation to six indeterminates: an inner world, spe-
28 cific others, general others, the external world, the movement into the future and
29 the limits of resources. These can be seen in basic everyday questions. How should
30 I feel? Who am I? What are the social rules? What are the facts? What is good,
31 right and beautiful? What is just?

32 Thus, social constructions exist in six arenas: (1) the inner world of the person,
33 (2) personal identities in relation to others, (3) appropriate social behaviour,
34 (4) understanding of the external world, (5) stories of how the social world works
35 and (6) systems of appropriate distribution. Each of these embodies power and is
36 formed under conditions of power. Each construction can be considered a claim
37 about the indeterminate and a claim on it; an enabling of the person to see and a
38 temporary blindness to alternatives. Since the constructions are formed, enabled
39 and constrained within power relations, arise out of conflict and can be contested,
40 each can be considered to have a politics.

- _____ 1 1. *The politics of authenticity*: What feelings are present and possible? What are
- _____ 2 the action and interpretive practices required for such feelings to arise? How
- _____ 3 are feelings and the production of feelings distributed and institutionalized?
- _____ 4 2. *The politics of identity and recognition*: Who are the people involved in this
- _____ 5 interaction? What are their implied rights and responsibilities with these iden-
- _____ 6 tities? How strongly do individuals identify with that identity? What would
- _____ 7 challenge that identity? How are identities institutionalized?
- _____ 8 3. *The politics of order*: What behaviours, actions and ways of talking are con-
- _____ 9 sidered appropriate? What norms and rules support these? Do individuals con-
- _____ 10 sider these to be legitimate and applicable to them? How are rules and norms
- _____ 11 institutionalized?
- _____ 12 4. *The politics of truth*: What do members think is true? What are their warrants
- _____ 13 for the truth claim? What are their processes of dispute and adjudication? How
- _____ 14 is knowledge relevancy determined? What are the practices of knowledge for-
- _____ 15 mation, distribution and institutionalization?
- _____ 16 5. *The politics of life narratives*: How does the world work? What would a good
- _____ 17 and beautiful future look like? What are members' preferred or expected ways
- _____ 18 of getting there? What are their favourite stories showing how things work?
- _____ 19 How are stories institutionalized? What are the decisional routines and stories
- _____ 20 that support them?
- _____ 21 6. *The politics of distribution*: What do they consider to be the right and appri-
- _____ 22 appropriate way to distribute resources? What is just to them? How are systems of
- _____ 23 distribution and justice institutionalized?
- _____ 24

_____ 25 These politics are not independent. We do not have feelings here, identities

_____ 26 here, knowledge here and so forth, but they in fact are intertwined as a bundle.

_____ 27 The arenas of political formations become articulated (conjoined in such a way

_____ 28 that orthogonal relations become oblique, as discussed in articulation theory)

_____ 29 together. Contesting one formation has implications for others (Laclau and Mouff

_____ 30 1985; Angus 1992). The resistance to change particularly in organizational life is

_____ 31 because of their articulation with each other. Identity politics, for example, cannot

_____ 32 be understood or engaged in itself; identities are articulated with knowledge claims,

_____ 33 with concepts of the good and beautiful, with concepts of justice and so forth (see

_____ 34 Deetz 2014) Think of the way science has become articulated with specific polit-

_____ 35 ical positions. In doing this work, we try to understand the ways in which these

_____ 36 become articulated, and, from that, figure out how to intervene in these articula-

_____ 37 tory practices. These articulated packages are produced under real conditions of

_____ 38 equity and inequity in specific historical conditions and for specific problems. If we

_____ 39 really want to understand how these politics work, how they become articulated

_____ 40 together, we have to put them in the real politics of their moments of formation

_____ 1 and the politics by which they are retained and reproduced (Haas and Deetz 2004;
 _____ 2 McClellan and Deetz 2012).

_____ 3 The analysis of social life shows that experience, actions and interactions are
 _____ 4 filled with unwitting consent, discursive closure and various forms of systematic
 _____ 5 distortions that lead people to prefer some things at the expense of others without
 _____ 6 anybody really being engaged in the choice of that preferencing. Rather social life
 _____ 7 is filled with giving into particular political formations without the capacity to
 _____ 8 step back and question them, let alone to engage in re-formation. Formations can
 _____ 9 be contested through disarticulation, reclaiming the struggle within and among
 _____ 10 the six politics listed above. The contestation, however, requires reclaiming some
 _____ 11 sense of indeterminacy and otherness. Dislodging that which has become common
 _____ 12 sense requires concrete interventions rather than general criticism or arguments
 _____ 13 out of simply different formations (Deetz and Simpson 2004). I do not believe
 _____ 14 that current concepts and practices of democracy provide the capacity to do this
 _____ 15 and thus I introduce interaction designs based within a co-generative democracy
 _____ 16 later in this chapter.

_____ 17 _____ 18 _____ 19 *The Organizational Context* _____ 20

_____ 21 Much of my work has focused on actual decision-making within the organiza-
 _____ 22 tional, especially work and corporation, context. Corporations, especially, are very
 _____ 23 impactful for democracy. First, they are powerful political actors in the traditional
 _____ 24 sense that can greatly distort the public decision-making process (Ibarra-Colado
 _____ 25 2007). This is why corporations were widely distrusted by the framers of the US
 _____ 26 constitution, and even Adam Smith treated them in a pejorative sense. Second, to
 _____ 27 be meaningful, democracy needs to occur in the places where most critical deci-
 _____ 28 sions are made. The corporate site is a key location where decisions are being made
 _____ 29 regarding the use of natural and human resources, the distribution of income and
 _____ 30 wealth, identities production and family relations and much more. From a moral
 _____ 31 standpoint, the public should be part of the processes that determine their future
 _____ 32 (Apel 1979; Pinchevski 2005). Existing systems for getting social value into the
 _____ 33 decision chain such as leader stewardship, governmental regulation and market
 _____ 34 pressures have tended to be only modestly effective, highly inefficient and often
 _____ 35 costly, and not productive of creative win-win choices. Finally, corporate organiza-
 _____ 36 tions – through internal training, media sponsorship and ownership, advertising,
 _____ 37 political messaging and so on – colonize the overall experience production process.
 _____ 38 The choices and activities of the corporate worksite are a central issue of democracy.

_____ 39 My early book *Democracy in an Age of Corporate Colonization* (1992) focused
 _____ 40 on the third issue. Twenty-five years later, I still often feel the need to explain the

1 inner colonization processes and how they occur. Corporations are very important.
2 Even today as we talk about the incredible rise of small businesses, the differ-
3 ences of knowledge-intensive and entrepreneurial work, we also discuss the cen-
4 tralization of industries, the impact of a particular corporate form of capitalism
5 and the spread of a business language. But I fear that my use of the term ‘colon-
6 ization’ was taken as more negative than intended, especially by those who cite
7 the title but did not read the book. Colonization was not to be seen as a totally
8 bad thing. Corporations also colonize away from a lot of irrational practices that
9 were quite damaging in many of our societies. It can be progressive and opening
10 or very limiting in actual impacts. Corporations are not to be simply condemned
11 as a colonizing force. We need to be specific about the times, places and ways it
12 expands or closes open public discussion and development. For example, as reli-
13 gion re-emerges as a central colonizing force in many communities around the
14 world, corporations may counter much of the ideology there.

15 But my own work over the years left the bigger questions of colonization
16 and focused on the micro-dynamics of decision-making and work-identity
17 production within organizations (Deetz 2003b). Much of this has shown that
18 ‘managerialism’ rather than simply capitalism has led to the greatest harm.
19 Short-termness, self-interest, philosophies of superiority and control, presump-
20 tions of value-neutrality and contrived economic rationality, and so on have all
21 had very high economic, social and environmental costs (Deetz 1995). Dom-
22 inant power relations have hurt work productivity and the economic health of
23 work organizations. Ways of overcoming the various distortions in represen-
24 tation of social values positively rationalize the largely narrow self-interested
25 value-laden choice-making fostered by what is called managerialism. The myth
26 of the ‘rational’, ‘economic’ organization hides the value system embedded in
27 the monetary code (e.g. accounting practices) and the multiple ways in which
28 values enter into social productions and decision-making. Values are already
29 present; the question is: whose and which values enter where within the decision
30 chain? And, do we have interaction designs that enable productive gains from
31 the tensions and differences?

32 Organizations, in general, and corporations, in particular, can be treated as
33 simply economic entities. They of course are not. They produce people as well as
34 products, and even the business decisions there are heavily value-laden and not
35 simply economically rational. Business decisions are made within contexts with
36 high degrees of uncertainty, judgements are sometimes based more on stories than
37 data and confirmation biases are rampant. Decisions are value-driven even when
38 put in the language of economics. Understanding those value-driven processes both
39 as they already exist and the ways in which we can intervene in them is essential.
40 My own interest finally is to try make decision processes more democratic and to

_____ 1 actually understand what forms of democracy might actually work to get a wider
 _____ 2 set of values involved within our corporate decision-making (Deetz 2003a).

_____ 3 Rather than review all the micro-aspects here, I will return to larger questions,
 _____ 4 but in a different way: a way that for me frames the need for critical analysis
 _____ 5 today. I think the need for critical studies especially focused on organizations and
 _____ 6 organizational decision-making is even more compelling today than in the past.
 _____ 7 I see five trends (listed below) that have significant social, economic and envir-
 _____ 8 onmental impacts and remain as a kind of time-bomb that could cause massive
 _____ 9 disruptions, further weaken democracy and foster a decline of civilization. The
 _____ 10 question is how to make systems that aid survival and hopefully provide the cap-
 _____ 11 acity to thrive in new contexts.

- _____ 12
- _____ 13 1. *Increased interdependence.* With interdependence, all decisions made by any
 _____ 14 group impact all. Differences are put into contact; it is harder and harder for a
 _____ 15 rights-based liberal democratic practices to make the necessary creative mutu-
 _____ 16 ally supportable decisions. We need to increasingly understand the ‘commons’
 _____ 17 and develop democratic practices that can make us more productive together.
 - _____ 18 2. *The decline of public institutions and capacity for effective public decision-*
 _____ 19 *making.* Will, legitimacy, process and capacity of public decision contexts
 _____ 20 are all weak. This could lead to crises and massive reform; however, various
 _____ 21 insights from critical work seem to provide a sufficient robust alternative.
 _____ 22 And, the pressing question comes as to how to get democracy to the sites
 _____ 23 where the actual critical decisions are being made in light of public institution
 _____ 24 inaction and decline, especially when many of these are economically driven,
 _____ 25 for-profit sites.
 - _____ 26 3. *Increased income inequality.* While worldwide poverty is in a slow decline
 _____ 27 reducing some forms of inequality, the gap between the upper 2 per cent and
 _____ 28 the rest is continuing to widen owing to contrived income allocation hidden
 _____ 29 under the pretence of market determination. Managerially dominated systems
 _____ 30 weaken the long-term economic health of organizations and reduce the cap-
 _____ 31 acity of organizations to play a positive role in society. And to the extent that
 _____ 32 income inequality leads to political inequality, the effect is not just on the lives
 _____ 33 of individual people.
 - _____ 34 4. *Global climate change:* Dislocation, migration and conflict are all spawned
 _____ 35 by the increase of extreme weather events and the more gradual sea-level rise
 _____ 36 and fresh water demand as well as species and agricultural changes. Existing
 _____ 37 systems of cross-sectional and cross-national governance are overstressed, and
 _____ 38 new systems with new logics and processes are needed.
 - _____ 39 5. *Increased sponsorship of human experience:* As PARC shows, human experi-
 _____ 40 ences are always products. Events are never experienced directly. But the chains

1 of mediation are becoming longer and sponsorship of parts of the process
 2 leading to specific experiences is greater. Essentially all human experience today
 3 is sponsored and unwittingly consented to by people taking it as their own.
 4 'Fake news' (or viral deception/viral disinformation) is only the most superfi-
 5 cial issue. Democratization of the production of experience through assuring
 6 diversity in production forces has become central to whether democracy exists
 7 at all. A society which lacks the interaction skills necessary to determine what
 8 is occurring around them in relevance to them cannot be democratic.
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10 These five trends are in many ways interdependent and mutually reinforcing.
 11 A positive vision is possible. The possible upside (if we have suitable interaction
 12 forums and designs) is that the opportunities and stresses in these could disrupt
 13 traditional authority structures and ideologies and hence move the human com-
 14 munity toward invention and creativity – genuine human growth; that is, we could
 15 become more productive together. But without sufficient critical reform of decision
 16 processes, ontological insecurity and embedded advantages will continue to lead
 17 to protectionism, fundamentalist religious wars, and attempts at overarching col-
 18 onization by the powerful. The integrating hope of neo-liberalism that economic
 19 systems has largely failed. In contrast, we could have a deeper democracy leading
 20 to a more mutually determined future of social, ecological and economic well-
 21 being or various dystopias. The quality of communication processes in decision-
 22 making is the determining factor.

23 For-profit organizations and their decision processes, perhaps even more than
 24 public sector groups, will have significant impact on the direction chosen. At times,
 25 and in some places, for-profit organizational choices have fostered increased edu-
 26 cation, communication skill development and the development of democracy gener-
 27 ally; lessened irrational responses to difference and groupings of people; taken
 28 the lead on response to environmental concerns and increased the inclusion of
 29 the needs of diverse populations in work and product development. But plenty of
 30 examples exist of less positive effects – creating contrived needs, environmental
 31 destruction, public manipulation, expanding income inequality and so forth.

32 Critical studies of various sorts stand alone in providing both (1) concepts to
 33 understand and investigate the forces of diminished public will, system irration-
 34 ality and skewing and (2) a proactive invention of a more robust and viable dem-
 35 ocracy. The former might be accomplished through identifying the various forces
 36 of structural and systemic distortion and discursive closure deepened by the PARC
 37 analytic, showing what is constructed in social and organizational life and how
 38 power relations enter into construction. Critical work is rare in that it is specifically
 39 designed to engage the five trends through improving decision processes making
 40 diversity positive, enriching democracy in the for-profit site, directly bringing social

1 and ecological issues into the decision-making chain, rationalizing these processes
2 with a broader sense of rationality rather than the managerial and identifying the
3 molecular nature of experience construction and democratization.
4
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6 *Co-Generative Democracy* 7

8 Much of the discussion in critical work of all sorts has centred on the need for
9 democratization, but often what holds it back is not the lack of desire but the
10 weakness of existing dominant conceptions and practices of democracy and the
11 incapacity to create a democracy that works (Deetz and Brown 2004). It is a belief
12 in many organizations that democratization, there understood as collaboration,
13 inevitably leads to more meetings. Collaborations sometimes do result in time-
14 consuming and dysfunctional meetings, which are procedure-centred, missing core
15 issues, lacking creativity, filled with positioning, involving too many people, and
16 where power differences are accentuated. The practice of collaboration has been
17 a mixed bag. But all forms of collaboration are not the same. Many are failure by
18 bad concept and design.

19 I agree with Benjamin Barber (1984, 1995) that much of the difficulty arises
20 out of design problems inherent in liberal democracy itself. Interaction forums and
21 practices arising out of eighteenth-century liberal democratic conceptions have
22 been institutionalized, and they are in no way carefully informed by contemporary
23 communication theory and research. Where would medicine be if eighteenth-
24 century concepts of biology and chemistry had as much impact today as eighteenth-
25 century concepts of the person, language and interaction have on democracy and
26 communication? Part of my interest in the organizational site arises from this.
27 Basic concepts and practices of democracy are not likely to change in the public
28 sphere except perhaps in communities owing to deeply embedded mindsets and
29 redundant institutionalization, but no such restriction exists in other organizations.

30 Recovery of suppressed conflict in experience production, contestation of the
31 six types of claims and disarticulation is best accomplished in carefully designed
32 interactions that foster inclusion and enable 'otherness' (Broadfoot and Munshi
33 2007). Attempts by 'experts' to do this for communities not only fail to get the type
34 of creativity and commitments required but also evoke resistance. Our experience
35 in numerous sites has been that organizations are like strings, best pulled rather
36 than pushed. Requirements for diversity and stakeholder engagement especially in
37 the deep and early stages of decision-making suggested here is a nonstarter espe-
38 cially if the organization does not have capacity to interact. In such cases, a set of
39 carefully designed interaction processes that have shown to be more effective and
40 mutually beneficial than routine processes has been recommended.

_____ 1 We know much today about how to design interactions that disarticulate,
 _____ 2 overcome confirmation bias and the like – all the core problems of joint decision-
 _____ 3 making today (Deetz and Simpson 2004). We already do it reasonably well in
 _____ 4 places where we cannot afford reoccurring mistakes. We often seem able to accept
 _____ 5 reoccurring failures in the public decision spaces. Why not support a democracy
 _____ 6 that supports and embraces the interaction designs that work?

_____ 7 All interaction designs have to work with four basic questions central to demo-
 _____ 8 cratic theory. These are answered differently based on larger concepts of human
 _____ 9 beings and their interaction.

- _____ 10
- _____ 11 1. What is the nature and source of human experience, knowledge and meaning?
 - _____ 12 2. How shall group and individual differences be presented or represented, or in
 - _____ 13 the case of democracies, how shall reciprocity be assured?
 - _____ 14 3. What shall be the preferred talk processes when we have differences and how
 - _____ 15 should the conflict around difference be adjudicated?
 - _____ 16 4. How shall we deal with the problem of scale given that decisions often involve
 - _____ 17 large populations?
- _____ 18

_____ 19 Liberal democratic conceptions and practices are based on particular answers
 _____ 20 to these four questions:

- _____ 21
- _____ 22 1. The autonomous individual is seen as the origin of perceptions, thoughts and
 - _____ 23 feelings. Communication study focuses on the expression of these.
 - _____ 24 2. Freedom of speech and speaking forums are considered to be adequate and
 - _____ 25 sufficiently available for equitable participation in decision-making.
 - _____ 26 3) Persuasion and advocacy are seen as the preferred mode of interaction when
 - _____ 27 differences are present leading to decisions by voting when differences and
 - _____ 28 conflict remain.
 - _____ 29 4) Representation is used to overcome problems of scale. Representation may be
 - _____ 30 based in lottery selection as in juries, elections as in representatives or distri-
 - _____ 31 bution as done in representing interests in community planning.
- _____ 32

_____ 33 The difficulty of liberal democracies and the embedded/enabling communi-
 _____ 34 cation theory for our contemporary and projected future is that it does not take
 _____ 35 into account actual power relations, assuming power can somehow be overcome
 _____ 36 by the force of reason and does not provide interaction processes that generate
 _____ 37 creativity.

_____ 38 Central to this has been the very first assumption that accepts a psychological
 _____ 39 rather than social communication basis for experience production. If construc-
 _____ 40 tionism is accepted, democracy exists or does not in the systems of construction

1 rather than expression. A critical interest in interaction has to focus on the inter-
 2 action processes by which experiences came to be rather than simply on the manner
 3 of their expression and coordination. If experiences are socially constructed, they
 4 are always done so within real historical conditions; hence relations of power are
 5 always embedded within constructions and relations of power determine who and
 6 how constructions can be used. All constructions benefit some more than others,
 7 but because they become a kind of common sense, the disadvantaged come to
 8 unwittingly reproduce their disadvantage as they freely speak meanings produced
 9 by others. High degrees of mediation of experience and the absence of places for
 10 critical discussions accentuate this effect.

11 To account for relations of power and to provide more creativity in human
 12 interactions in contrast to liberal democracy, I propose a co-generative democ-
 13 racy, a democracy based on the potential productivity of difference in interaction.
 14 Co-generative democracy

- 15
- 16 1. describes experience as a power laden relational construction;
- 17 2. uses a strong sense of reciprocity as a normative ideal for the distribution of
- 18 expression turns;
- 19 3. prefers *collaborative talk* (see Gray 1989);
- 20 4. overcomes scale by the preservation and presentation of meaningful differences
- 21 (see Deetz 2017).
- 22

23 In sum, understanding relational construction is core to responding to our
 24 situation today. Understanding this leads to a focus on embedding democratic
 25 processes deeper within our private and non-governmental organizations and
 26 inventing a new kind of public governance. But for this to be effective, new demo-
 27 cratic governance concepts and practices must be advanced that enable more
 28 robust interaction designs.

29 A different kind as well as place of democracy is available to us. Co-generative
 30 democracy is focused on making creative decisions, rather than one focused on
 31 talking. It starts with a fundamental difference from liberal democracy in that
 32 it presumes that what we understand and how we feel are social constructions.
 33 The interaction processes that form meanings are more central than the ones
 34 that express them. Freedom of speech and so forth is clearly a necessary but not
 35 sufficient condition for a productive democracy. The freedom to speak mean-
 36 ings that were formed by others does not give much freedom. The freedom and
 37 recovery of productive conflict has to be in the formation of meanings, and if
 38 the formations of meaning are taking place in companies, it has to be within
 39 the formation of the place that meanings are actually being formed and public
 40 decisions made.

Conclusion

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The current historical moment requires improvements in the capacity of the public to make critical decisions. More can be done to accomplish this in non-governmental and commercial organizations. But to do this, new organizational forms and decision processes are needed, as well as changes in management processes that were designed for other people in other times and places.

I believe that critical studies is especially important because of its stronger social theory, more balanced and nuanced analyses and the capacity to reclaim organizational rationality. I have argued that a PARC analytic plus interaction designs based in a co-generative democracy offers much. Together they provide:

- an *Appreciative Analytic*, through a unified way of understanding the complex processes of organizational life by focusing on organizational constructions in lived settings;
- a *Critical Analytic*, through directing the evaluation of existing organizational forms and activities and looking at embedded power relations, systematic distortions, and contrived consent;
- a *Transformative Analytic*, through providing guidance for the skill development of members and redesign of organizational structures and practices that allow earlier and deeper inclusion of diverse values in the decision chain, thereby increasing organizational learning and innovation and the ability to increase economic, social and ecological goods.

The open and responsive development of organizations and the capacity to contribute to democracy is lost when an organization cannot identify the specific nature of their constructions, the way they are articulated together, and establish practices of active reconstruction.

The ultimate goal of democratization is to get a wider set of values, including social and environmental ones, as well as less contrived economic ones, earlier and deeper into the decision processes. Core to this all is building communication and decision-making processes that lead to outcomes which are more desirable on multiple criteria, feasible in light of existing circumstances and sustainable over time and changing circumstances. To do this requires decision processes that generate high degrees of creativity in decisions, commitment to and compliance with decisions, and choices customized to local circumstances. High degrees of collaboration across a diverse membership appears to be the only way to reliably accomplish this, but not all collaborative designs are equal. The creation of concepts and interaction design formed out of co-generative democracy is a step towards providing necessary capacities.

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