

## The Limits of Language in Doing Organizational Work

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Comments welcome.

To the workshop readers of this draft: There are many ideas associated with these individuals which have not yet found their way into this conversation. For instance, Rorty's own detailed discussion of the "limits of language" has not been incorporated, nor has Gadamer's dialectics of preunderstanding / understanding in expanding our language, or Habermas' colonialization of the lifeworld. We would appreciate your thoughts on other ideas of these authors you think we should include, but most importantly, a direction you might take in part two if you were one of these participants. We would like to allow the workshop participants to play out the next part of the conversation.

## The Limits of Language in Doing Organizational Work

This is an account of an imaginary, virtual meeting in which the voices of Pierre Bourdieu, C. West Churchman, Georg Gadamer, Jurgen Habermas, Bruno Latour , Richard Rorty, and Sir Geoffrey Vickers, create a roundtable discussion on the topic "Are there limits to language which effect our design of organizational systems?" The pretext for this virtual meeting is to revisit the age old questions of why so many organizations disappoint us. Why do so many opportunities for human betterment through organizations go unrealized? Why are so many systems socio-technical systems not used to there full potential? In this roundtable on the limits of language and the design of orgamnizations, most of the participants are imagined to be on line in a human form, while Geoffrey Vickers ( † 1982) , Georg Gadamer( † 1999) and C. West Churchman ( † 2004) are imagined as participating in a cyber form. These three are represented in the roundtable discussion by a conversation system that has been informed with their writings, and those of their favorite authors. A performative genre was chosen as our format in order to make the ideas of these authors come alive and interact in a way that cannot be achieved in a "normal" research paper. Whereas a normal research paper follows a logic of coherency and consistency in developing its theoretical argument, and thereby strives for a single persuasive voice, a performative genre allows the diverse logics of multiple voices to interact in a conversation of differences and to paint a complex theoretical landscape. Also, and perhaps more importantly, this performative approach to writing allows the manuscript to emerge in the process of writing it, as we give voice to one

author at a time, and allow each new addition to the emerging manuscript to be a response to what has been said before. By allowing each voice to have its way, and by writing through an iterative back and forth exchange of the manuscript, we as authors have been genuinely surprised to see where it leads. The things these characters say are quotations from what they actually have said, so there will be no references to their writings or interviews where these statements are to be found. But we believe that the statements we have put in their mouths reflect their key ideas and personalities, based on our study of their works. The performative genre we employ represents a modest attempt of two scholars who have spent some time thinking about each of these individual's writings to let them loose in an imaginary conversation and see what happens.

As we imagine it, the format is a video conference in which Vickers', Gadamer's and Churchman's synthesized voices are accompanied by animations of them.

**Geoffrey Vickers:** This workshop was called because some of you are some of my favorite thinkers on the questions relevant to the design of organizations while others of you have addressed issues relevant to organization design, throughout your lives. West Churchman was chosen for his work in system thinking and the systems approach to inquiry. Georg Gadamer was invited because of his significant thinking about systems and life as a living tradition of meanings, which we cannot escape. Jurgen Habermas was invited because of his thorough and systematic attempts to develop a theory of action and systems based on a linguistic turn. Bruno Latour was chosen for his studies of the way we put our interests to work in creating and

deploying technologies, the study of how systems come to be as a continuing accomplishment of network of diverse actors. Pierre Bourdieu was chosen for his unique approach to the study of practice and the process of generative structuralism that produces and reproduces social and organizational practices. Richard Rorty was asked to join us because of his beautiful writings as an American pragmatist in the tradition of Dewey. So you might see that I have chosen this group as a reflection of how I would define myself. I am a pragmatist and a system thinker who is focused on our immersion in language and tradition and recognizes the socially imbued quality of the multivalued judgements we must make in designing and managing organizational systems. The topic was proposed because of my own position that the language and cognitive schemas which we as humans have evolved over the last million years or so, are now encountering a new kind of environment - one of our own making in which we are increasingly blinded to the limits of thought and action that we have created for ourselves through our language use. I would like to start our discussion by exploring those ideas a bit more fully and then open it up to your criticism and your own position on language, limits and design. But first, I want to thank you all for joining me in this virtual roundtable tonight.

**Pierre Bourdieu:** I am willing to participate in this experiment, but I think the questions of organization, technology and design that you pose are much more complex than the way you have represented them.

**West Churchman:** You haven't, for instance, mentioned ethics as an essential feature of any such discussion.

**Georg Gadamer:** Well, I am a humanist and my interest has always been in fighting against the barbarian tendencies in our society that devalue tradition, human values the spirit of a culture. I see most technologies as undermining the great Western tradition of humanity but if I can show the value of a living tradition, I will be satisfied.

**Jurgen Habermas:** The issues you raise are the some of the great challenges of modernity and I see in your opening statement the central concern that I myself have explored: how systems colonize our lived experience- the lifeworld. I also see a question which I too have sought throughout my life: is there a hope for rationality which extends beyond a simple calculus of control and utility?

**Bruno Latour:** I don't know what I can contribute to this complicated topic you have chosen. I know so little about social organization, but then none of us does. Still, I will do what I can.

**Richard Rorty:** Well, I'm skeptical of what could be accomplished, but am looking forward to an interesting evening and will try to help the conversation along as best I can.

**Geoffrey Vickers:** Excellent! Thank you for that supportive attitude. Let me open the discussion by summarizing why I pose the topic as the

“Limits of Language”. I do so primarily because of a belief that all systems have in them an inherent set of self-generated limits and that those limits are associated with the characteristic dynamics of that system. That, of course, is a general system belief, and in a moment I will identify some ways in which I see that systemic principle applying to language. But another reason I choose that title is Wittgenstein’s haunting phrase from the end of *Tractatus*, “The limits of my language are the limits of my world.” That line is so evocative for me, that I find it popping into my thoughts all the time. So in both those senses, I felt that “Limits of Language” would be an intriguing topic for us.

The systemic limits of language that concern me most are first, the limits related to the collapse of the multi-valued experience of human judgment into a single valued language of policy discourse; and second, the limits resulting from a language that has evolved over many millennia of rather slow change, confronting a world of exceedingly rapid change. Let me discuss each of them briefly. First, we are, I believe, limited in our ability to reason at the policy level because we collapse judgments of what we value and what constitutes a betterment for us given those values, with judgments of what constitutes an expansion of our resources or of efficiency in our use of these resources. Judgments of betterment are political judgments (*polis*), and judgments of expansion are economic judgments (*techne*), each having its own language and logic. Yet, we collapse the judgment of betterment into the judgment of expansion by relying on an economic language as the sole language

for thinking through organizational and design questions. We don't use a language of politics to discuss values in our judgments of betterment, and our organizations are worse off for it — especially in their uses of technology.

**Pierre Bourdieu:** If you are saying that the field of organization is fundamentally a field of power struggles, then we have a common reference point.

**Geoffrey Vickers:** I'm not just saying that — I am saying that our language is inadequate to our task as responsible actors in today's social world. Our language, having collapsed judgments of betterment into an economic vocabulary of expansion, fools us into using a trajectory-like image for guiding our thinking about design, management and organization. We are dominated by images of directionality, especially upward thrust, rather than images of evolutionary adaptation. The guiding imagery of our language is based on increase and forward motion rather than balance and adjustment.

In this way, our language and its related mental schemata hide from us the systemic properties of self generated limits in social systems and of the need for creating more cybernetically sensitive vocabularies for use in policy discourse. We go around changing the world to suit our selves and mistakenly believe that it is an expanding of our opportunities rather than a limiting of them. We believe our increasing use of technology is giving us increased

power and control. We don't see that it is really creating new forms of instability in our social systems, and that those instabilities become the source of new problems, which we then address with the same misguided logics of expansion and control.

**Georg Gadamer:** I agree with you that our current thinking is limited in its view of language and has only a minimal understanding of the limits of language. Hence, the discourse on managerial decision making ignores the idea of polis and sees it as techne only. Yet, everything we experience and make sense of in our world, is mediated by our language. As I have said: language is the house of my being- there is nothing outside the lived experience of language- it is fundamental to our human existence. Therefore, cutting the language of management off from the living tradition of human experience and judgment means reducing our potential for a full human life. We are also blinded and incapable for expanding and renewing the living tradition. In fact, we cannot even generate new and important questions by which we could approach our experience and history. In contrast, we only ask a limited set of questions in the face of so many new things, which emasculates our experience and life. Simply put, our tradition is decaying and we are moving to a barbarian state of techne.

**Jurgen Habermas:** I must say that I am not as pessimistic as my countryman about the future and the potential of our society and its capacity for managerial response. Although I see the language of cybernetics to be too limited to address the issue we are talking here

- in which I side totally with Georg- I am more optimistic in my belief of how language pervades different realms of human action and how it can and must overcome its technocratic straitjackets. Simply, we need modes of language use that approach the world with the ideas of control, efficiency and calculus of utilities. This is necessary for freeing us from the limits and whims of nature. But this is not enough for a full human project. We must also see language as a means to fill our life with full human drama and significance as we approach the unique conditions of what it means to be a human being in a society- the task which Aristotle clearly recognized when he separated techne from polis. It is only in this context that ideas of right and wrong, multi-valued goals and our modes of justifying them come into focus. The great tragedy of modernity is that its life-world has become increasingly colonized by the system logic of money and control in which human initiative and values are becoming lost. To overcome these dangers we must admit the universal nature of language as a medium and means for rational choice, when it is used in ways which enable public discourse and submit to the force of the better argument which is freed from vested interests and domination. If these conditions are met the language may have limits, but these limits are not closed forever and for everyone, but are rather determined by the social conditions which (non)reflectively produce them. I think I have said enough here, but as the debate ensues I want to come back to the main concerns I have about the currently dominating logic of technical rationality.

**Pierre Bourdieu:** I would like to pose right at the beginning that I take the limits of language to be quite different than what all previous speakers have proposed, especially if we mean to reflect on the practice of organizational work. I think we need to step down from the idealized world of cyber-control, or the heaven of German idealism and lebenswelt, and rather explore what people actually do in organizations with their language and technologies and how these accomplishments create necessary and non-necessary borders for our talk about this practice. If organizational work means the construction of practices in organizations, then I think it is much more appropriate for us to step back from suppositions about language structures and look carefully at the field in which that language operates, especially the struggle for power in that field and the ways in which organizational work is a structuring structure. By that I mean that we must attend to the ways in which system work is the reproduction of power relations and the redistribution of capital in organizational fields, and how language is an important means in this struggle. Language has a structure, which shapes the ongoing creation of other structures. Systems of social organization and technologies become structuring structures and in so doing they objectify the subjectivity which Vickers seems to be so fascinated by.

If there is a limit to language, it is found in the ways in which individuals come to believe that their habitus — their orientations, expectancies and readiness to act — are a universal subjectivity rather than a localized field of practice in which their particular

subjectivity is generated, through a generative dynamics of binary oppositions that mark significant positions in their field and provide a basis for the forms and distribution of its capital. This is all relational and must be approached as such. In other words, it isn't the logic of the actor, the tradition, or the universal pragmatics of language, but the logic of their practice in a field that is going to generate the propensities of that field that we must consider if we are to explore limits of language in organizational work.

**C. West Churchman:** I feel that you are at once too close to the ground with your talk of local practices and fields, and too far from the real problem with your talk of structured structuring structures. Yes, we have habitus and fields, or as I prefer to say, "Weltanschauung", but that is a condition for the operation of reason, and it is the operation of reason that we must pay attention to here. In this sense I side with Jurgen that we must redeem and defend reason as the ultimate ground of our limits of language. If there are limits to language, they will make a difference in differences that matter most: our choices- or they will make no difference at all. And the central requirement for reason is to have a guarantor. The guarantor of reason in language use will ultimately be concerned with finding a way to, as it were, swallow the whole. By this I mean that reasoned choices, to be rational in any meaningful sense, must be choices which consider the full, relevant system and chose from the full set of available alternatives and offer a compelling logic why and how we chose specific alternatives. So it is not the thing that someone does or chooses to do that determines its rationality, but all the

things that they do not do or choose to do. It is the continued construction of the missed alternatives that we could choose among that we should be paying attention to, if we are serious about the real limits of language. In this regard the idea of conditions in which language is used freely – the ideal speech situation- is one nice contribution to think about our limits of language and design. But another consideration is the recursive and complementary nature of different inquiring systems which we need to mobilize in those debates. Looking at practices may be of some relevance in the modeling of systems but it is on the modeling of our world and of worlds other than ours through the use of alternative inquiring systems that we must focus, not on practice as it is today. Modeling of possible worlds and inquiry into their functioning as wholes, where debates emerge, is what will enable us to create a more enduring and beautiful world. This is what doing organizational work is all about in the end.

Pierre Bourdieu: All the other possible worlds and their alternatives!  
Worlds other than our own! Such bizarre and uniquely American ideas of “boundless frontiers” and fascination with manifest destiny. The logic of practice is always very heavily constrained when our habitus, as memory, meets the objectivity of a field. Our history is brought forward into the present in our habitus, or in living tradition as my friend Georg would say. We face the field we encounter as an objectified structure- a tradition- that we cannot reinvent. The result of this encounter is only an objective set of probabilities for alternative paths that a practice can take, not an open world of

“anything goes” or where we universally can decide what is best for us or for others. Here the structuring structure can act as a springboard for the types of questions which we ask in these encounters and thus condition what relations are organized differently.

Bruno Latour: Excuse me, but if I may sneak in a word edgewise here. I am fascinated and also humbled by the incredibly detailed knowledge and precise expression you all possess about something I find utterly mysterious. The words you have been using with such abandon — words like society, structures, policy, ideal speech, tradition, polis, cybernetic systems and so on are completely beyond my humble ability to do tricks with and to juggle in the ways that you do. My vocabulary in comparison is quite poor. I don't know how to begin dealing with these invisible things you seem to take for granted — where can I go and observe them? What door of what room in regular or cyber space should I open so that I can learn to know them in this amazing way?

I know it's tempting to speak of such imaginary things as if they had a certain causal power in our life. These kinds of fetishes can perhaps bring you some piece of mind or at least provide a handy pivotal point for your arguments, but they should be resisted if we are to say something interesting about technology and organizing.

When I told my friend Barbara Czarniawska that I was going to participate in this cyber salad on the limits of language, she

immediately shouted “There are no limits to language! We are always saying new things, always inventing new words, creating new forms of expression and new genres!” And, of course, she is right in a certain sense, but I do see even in our little discussion this evening how particular ways in which the participants use language sets limits for our thinking. Sir Geoffrey, for instance, in his strangely disembodied form, argues that our language tricks us into thinking about trajectories when we really should be thinking about evolutionary adaptability. But either way, whether it is a mythical journey to Nirvana or our true home, or whether it is sexual reproduction making us ever more fit as a species, you end up fixated on an imaginary essence without realizing how that essence is necessarily tangled up in all manner of mysterious, invisible causal explanations.

Professor Bourdieu on his part is limited by the very precision of his language: so that fields, habitus, forms of capital, positions, and power struggles become a landscape from which he cannot escape to simply look around and consider what other things might be going on in creating an organization and its technologies. What a dreary, predetermined world this language of practice becomes in which by explaining everything we understand nothing, and in which we purify our predetermined analysis with reflexivity on our own reflexivity. These reverberating reflexive shadows do not help eyesight, and it is a humble, open set of eyes and ears we need in studying system work.

West Churchman wants us to be able to see wholes — but the social world we live in is flat and indivisible. There is no place one can stand to see wholes or anything like them in this flat world of ours. There are no lumpy, abstract high points in the landscape: a closely limited horizon of local situations is all we have to see and navigate within. So immediately his language limits us to the unseeable, the unspeakable and the unreachable. This, I hope you will all agree is a pretty severe limit.

With regard to Habermas and Gadamer I have very little to say as my humble mind has never reached these heights of German philosophy. What can I, a sociologist from a French mining university say to two grand philosophers of our century whose intellectual edifice is so high and has so many rooms that I do not know where to start opening the doors? I see no living traditions and I see no forces of better argument. I see only tricks, persuasions, connections and artifacts that are mobilized in these vibrating networks of actors. The story here is that there is no grand story- we no more are modernists.

Pierre Bourdieu: Mr. Latour is a bit too flamboyant for my taste and his false modesty of how little we know of organizations is not well founded. I do know something about information technology design and organizations. I know, and I believe it is clear that anyone who takes the trouble to collect and quantify and categorize the data in an exhaustive and careful manner as I have will also know certain things about the fields, habitus and practice involved. The field of

the technology analyst is a globalized professional field in which consultant/designers struggle for the cultural capital of intellectual achievement and for economic capital. The field of the worker is primarily a local organizational field in which workers struggle primarily for the social capital of affiliation. From this view, the problem of implementation is readily apparent. The logic of practice of the consultant/designer expects that workers should be readily willing to make some simple change in daily routines because it is a rational response to the functional requirements of accumulating intellectual capital. For the worker, embedded in a generative cycle of social capital based practices, a change that is considered minor by the designer is in fact a threatening disruption of their life and very position in the field. A robbing of the very relations and conditions on which their social capital is based.

I further know that the consultant/designer and the worker are in fields with different temporal rhythms. For the worker it is a rhythm of short cycles and many repetitions per day. For the designer it is a long cycle rhythm with weeks or months between milestones or repetitions. For the worker it is a rhythm of familiarity — for the designer a rhythm of novelty. The designer moves freely through a global professional space while the worker is generally confined to a local market of limited movement. And I could go on and on with these things we know quite clearly about information technology and organizations. It is not so mysterious as you claim and there is very clear sense what the design is all about in this field.

C. West Churchman: I agree with you on that last point, at least. And in my own defense, I know that the designer has to act. As befuddling as the situation might seem, designers have to muster the courage and the moral judgment to model the whole as best they can, recognizing the inferential leaps involved, and deducing a choice. Imperfect as this sounds, and difficult as the limits of language we have all identified make it, the designer has to act in the end and he has to act responsibly. And because I know that, I know that reason as a guarantor for the designer's action is the foundation language problem we must address.

Richard Rorty: And I know that we have a striking diversity of vocabularies here; flatland, generative structuralism, schemata, deductive logics, and all the subtexts they proliferate. There is a peculiar sense in which all of you are using vocabularies that are implicitly claiming to let us hear or see organizations as they really are. Of course, you know I reject that claim, but what are we left with? What kind of conversation do we make with all these vocabularies overturning and undermining each other? I think of Wittgenstein's comment on language as a tool box from the *Philosophical Investigations*: "And how many kinds of sentences are there? Countless kinds. Think of the tools in a tool box." I would like us to think of these different vocabularies we have displayed here tonight not as contestants in a competition to see who is right or who is closest to getting the correct description of technology or organization or system work, but as tools available to a discerning

crew of workers doing system work. Or perhaps we should think of them as voices in a chorus where the thing we try to get right, as it were, is the harmonious blending of voices — the aesthetics of representation that we can interweave with these diverse voices- like Bach's great Oratorios. We must also explore how these voices in this chorus open us to invite other vocabularies of representation including sound, visual imagery, art and even dance.

I like Barbara Czarniawska's intuition about the question we are discussing. There are limits to language only if we let there be limits as Jurgen points out: we should not shut off other voices and close off our conversations because we fear they might lead to dead ends or go against our vested interests. But, of course, this may leave us in our self made dead end, we began conversing only with those who prefer our own preferred vocabulary or rules of engagement. Keeping the conversation going with an open and changing chorus of vocabularies is the best way I know of to keep language free of limits.

Geoffrey Vickers: This notion of music, imagery and art is one point I strongly agree with. I've always felt there were multiple forms of consciousness at work in the way judgments were actually made in organizations. I've always thought that multiple kinds of sensations were constitutive of what I call appreciate judgments, which is when our judgments of reality and our judgments of value are brought together in a multi-valued judgment of fit. We know something is the correct thing to do not because of logic alone, but because of an

appreciative judgment of fit between multiple values and reality. Appreciative judgment rests on aesthetics and on all the senses which are subject to aesthetic judgments of fitness, appropriateness and desirability. Appreciative judgment is what drives action, not rational choice.

Richard Rorty: There you go again, down a path of searching for an ideal management's own preferred vocabulary.

Bruno Latour: But you know, Rorty, as I sit here listening to you, it suddenly hits me how you yourself are trapped in a limited vocabulary of associating thinking with something that happens in our heads and something that takes place in words. I much prefer to think of thinking as something we do with our hands and our bodies. As Hutchins shows so beautifully, our cognition is a distributed cognition in which humans and artifacts together create calculation and intelligent performance- a thing which most Western philosophy has ignored since Descartes. It looks that human have no body, only brains and they can mostly only see or hear text. So rather than being trapped into confusing vocabulary with thinking mind without body, as you seem to when you ask us to keep our thinking open by keeping our vocabularies open, I would much rather have us think about thinking mind as something we make together with our body in relation to artifacts, handwork, physical motion, tactile manipulation, inscriptions, and of, course, words as well. The focus would then be on the making of cognition and acting in as open a way as possible, not just blending minds' diverse voices as if they

were ready manufactured in our brains. To pick up on the tool metaphor you started to develop but then dropped, I would like us to think of system work as tool based collective work. The tools we use in this work are multiple professional languages and the kinds of tools we are able to put our hands are their vocabularies and all artifacts that are mobilized through the deployment of those vocabularies. It is not just the words we use but all the things we do with them, with our bodies and our hands that do the thinking and in that sense, the language of system work is the network of actors and actants that are mobilized through these multiple vocabularies. Maybe if we could see a kind of motion picture close up of the system worker, it would help us see how unique and singular each site of system work is and it sets in motion multiple different actors and their scripts. If there are limits to this hand-work language they are to be found in each filming locating where the actors are making their own contexts and their own scripts as they make the organization and the information systems. So there are only local limits, and local limits will prevail in language use.

Pierre Bourdieu: Yes, in a sense there are only local limits, but this is only true in a trivial sense; a sense in which the langue and parole of language are confused. The local, situated use of langue, its parole, will always be a limit in a superficial sense. But in a generative sense, in the only truly important sense, the structuring structure of language, its langue, is the determining language operation. Only langue and the structure of its binary oppositions set the limits of language that will prevail.

West Churchman: I feel that in my saying what I conclude about language, I have ended up being mis-characterized here, and perhaps at some later time that is a part of the limits of language that I will think about further. But for now, what I must point out is how my conclusions about reason, guarantors and the need for a sense of the whole system, have turned out to mask something even more important in my views on language and their limits — something that serves as my ontological grounding and is in stark contrast to Bourdieu and Latour. Reason, guarantors or a sense of whole are not the wellspring of my thinking — they are merely the best conclusion I can reach, using both logic and emotion. The wellspring for my thinking is the individual human being. The lonely, isolated, mortal, struggling, flesh and blood human being who acts — that is what requires reason, sense of whole and a guarantor. And that foundation of the singular, passionate, morally responsible, and often anguished human being from which I draw my conclusions is missing from both your arguments. I am a humanist, pure and simple, and I am proud of it. I reject what both Latour and Bourdieu have said — realizing that they disagree between themselves quite strongly, but seeing each of them as losing sight of the primacy of the individual. Latour accuses me of looking to the imaginary and the unknowable for the operation of reason. But he, in turn, has made the individual disappear in favor of a circulating network of humans and artifacts, any node of which is subject to mediation and translations of interests. Bourdieu makes the individual disappear into recursively reproduced practices where habits replace the passion and will of the singularly potent person.

Give me the flesh and blood, the agonizing existential reality of the human being facing the dread of everyday responsibilities. That's where I want to start. That is what is real: the individual human actor answering to God and the future of humankind for her actions.

Richard Rorty: That's good, very good — a nice dramatic move, West. It really got me on my feet and dancing and that's important after so much solemn celebration of the cerebral. Seriously, though, what you say is important because it brings us back to the way that our existence in a human community activates our emotions, our sense of affiliation, our sense of moral responsibility and all the many uniquely human qualities that should, I think, be central to this discussion of language and limits. It seems to me that West's passion for the morally responsible individual is important if we are to bring ourselves as human actors and our own limits into this discussion. Which, I think, we must. Literature, of course, is another way to do that.

Georg Gadamer: I must also here side with West but with a twist and reformulation. As I said in the start I am a humanist- and I have always been a humanist and I am proud of it. Therefore all this technospeak is so alien to me, and I felt uncomfortable to participate in a project like this but I decided to do so as I want to defend the humanism as a stance and as our only hope for a meaningful life. What I see coming from technology is just the contrary: it has banalized our culture, commercialized all experience and narrowed down our sense of history and weakened the strength of tradition. Therefore seeing individuals who can make choices is the first hope

for humanism. But I must go against the idea that individuals at the end decide. It is the effective history of tradition which bound these humans that enables these individual to move to a new understanding of the world and the choices that are open for new meanings. Individuals outside and without tradition are powerless as they do not participate in making history.

Jurgen Habermas: I see myself as a humanist too. For me the humanism is not just fancy nice idea of making choices and being free. It is the only hope against another round of holocaust- the horrors of which shaped my youth. Here we were faced agonizing responsibility which cannot be more daunting and more critical. But I also see that humanism centered around an individual- no matter how beautiful and brave this idea is- as a stance is powerless unless we amplify it with the idea of critical discourse and its very idea that things can be better on rational grounds. This also implies that the future is open to us and laws of society are different from laws of nature and we can rationally design and decide how we make our future. Humanism must be combined with the concept of rational design and design with a rational stance. This enables us ask as agonizing designers how things can be otherwise on a rational basis- one of the major arguments that my mentor Adorno taught me about critical theory. Asking this question leads also to go beyond a fate of a lonely individual, and explore how power and domination shape her thinking, what voices are not heard and not allowed to be heard, what communications are distorted when he or she faces moment of truth.

There is another aspect of design which relates to the idea what is the “world” were designing and to which we are projecting ourselves. Only most naïve positivists and engineers think that design is just the reconfiguration of the external world and gaining better control of it through applying causal laws. There is no sense of beauty or justice or even truthful world in such idea of design. The language is thus very limited and rude as it does not matter whether we engineer atoms, bits, molecules emotions or social bonds. It’s all the same. This attitude can be used and is many times used to as an abstraction to think about how to effectively organize social life but if allowed to run amok- as I have argued many times- it will create a world colonized by blind institutional power and money. I see Bourdieu’s ideas of cultural capital and fields and power relations to be a good representation of how our world of design will be cynically seen if we only assume that self-interest (or not interest) and engineering of social bonds prevail. In the same vein Bruno’s idea of material and human networks as huge cog works which are lumped together based on actors’ calculations of interests and deception is a world where true politics are replaced with self calculated strategic action of heterogeneous engineering. Human societies and their design resemble programming genetically or through conditioning human and communities, and we become just behavioral animals that can be programmed with specific responses. I can see value in such analysis in understanding the lower bound of organization and organizing in social analysis. It is also very revealing as a theoretical lens how social action (or socio-technical

action) in post-modern societies is theoretically analyzed. At the end all human and what we regard as social is emasculated in this iron cage that captures a true human jungle of ants.

Therefore I see that Geoffrey's call for real politics and value judgments is truly necessary in our critical design of social systems. Geoffrey's idea of value judgments demands us to integrate our interventions into the external world with recognized (ethical) norms and values that are morally binding. Note that these norms are not just things that can be identified, controlled and manipulated. In contrast they are the foundation of social bonds and expectations i.e. the social contract which defines us as free men. With the idea of contracts we move us beyond ants and become members of polis. This jump requires at the same time in our designs to coordinate action between the world of social norms and the world of things and objects. There are responsible subjects who are ethically conscious and see designs as contracts between free men. This is valuable and good as it moves up in our understanding how we limit our designs with the specific language that formulate our projects. But Geoffrey's analysis still leaves open how do we see these norms as normatively binding and how do we learn and analyze them as human beings. Here I see the value of Gadamer's notion of tradition and the horizon of meanings as it enables us to expand the limits of language to the issue how we "design" or rather "build" our life-worlds. Norms make sense to us only when they are mobilized in communications and are therefore built through communications. The very idea of communications and sharing of life-worlds creates

thus the basis all for norms as they are assumed in all human linguistic interactions ( e.g., use language correctly, be clear, be truthful, be cooperative and assume that we seek genuinely truth). Thus the idea of living tradition as an open dialogue implies that we assume that our norms evolve and are dependent on life-worlds and what meanings they enable us project to our experiences of the world. As you can see here we are not any more ants we are designing free men who have capability to communicate and express their concerns in ways which create normatively and ethically binding contracts and their justifications. Finally, the idea of communication moves us to level where can challenge any claims that are inherently mobilized in all communications.: are we clear, are we speaking truth, do we follow or submit to norms that are justifiable, or are we sincere? If these claims can be raised in any context we have the potential for conversations that offer a new possibility to define rationality. Like Rorty I thus believe that conversations is the only thing which keeps our designs and the design language moving and the limits of the language depend on how we define our languages that build the limits.

Geoffrey Vickers: We seem to have covered a lot of ground here in our discussions, but I'm wondering just how far we have really come. I have told the Millennium Technology Committee that we would prepare some kind of statement summarizing our position on the limits of language in doing system work, and I do hope we can achieve that before we conclude our roundtable discussion. At this point I would suggest we take a short break, say about two hours,

and then return to our conversation with an eye to formulating such a statement. I look forward to seeing you all then.

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