Resemiotization

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> Suppose we stop looking at individual objects.
> See them instead as participating in a long
> stream of events that unfold through time;
> chart their flow; then consider persons only as
> the points where flows of objects originate,
> congregate and from which they disperse.
> This long view takes both producers, distrib-
> utors, and recipient-users into account at once.
> (Douglas 1994: 17)

Prologue

Consider the following scenario: The New South Wales Department of
Health has made a budget available for the renovation and expansion
of a mental hospital. An architect-planner is hired to produce the
project's planning report for the local health authority. His report is
to set out how available funds can be best used to do the work. After
five meetings with health officials, engineers, architects, and future users
of the building, and after three drafts of the report and of its tenta-
tive two-dimensional drawings, everybody present at the last meeting
signs off on the planning report. During the next stage of the project,
the report's two-dimensional drawings are used to produce three-
dimensional computer-generated designs. These designs are plotted onto
special sheets, which become the basis from which the builders proceed
with their construction of the building.

Apart from producing a newly renovated mental hospital, *what does
this 'stream of events'/'flow of objects' mean?*

Introduction

This article looks at a planning project. It does so from the point
of view of how this project gradually moves from temporal kinds of

meaning-making, such as talk and gesture, towards increasingly durable kinds of meaning-making, such as printed reports, designs, and, ultimately, buildings. Along the way, participants' disagreements, confusions, and contestations are backgrounded, and their concerns, if considered legitimate and important, are transformed into technical and engineering issues, or recontextualized as architectural-structural solutions.

These outcomes are not primarily or necessarily the result of extensive, exhaustive discussion and equitable involvement of all concerned. Neither are they a natural and unproblematic product of the process, in so much as that there are distinct differences between, for example, what was said and what was formally reported, and between what was reported and how the building was designed. Instead, it seems as if the project moves along on the strength of the following two complementary and inherent aims. First, it increasingly abstracts meanings away from issues of localized difference and concern into specialized and technical discourses and practices. Second and concomitantly, the project shifts its focal point towards and thus 'inscribes' increasingly resistant materialities (Latour and Woolgar 1979; Joerges and Czarniawska 1998).

In its concern with the role of material reality in communication, the present article takes Jakobson's concept of 'intersemioticity' (Jakobson 1971: 261), originally referring to the translation of one language into another, as its point of conceptual departure. In the perspective taken here, the concept's reference to translations among different linguistic meaning systems can be extended to include translations that occur between different semiotic systems and their materialities. These translations are intersemiotic insofar as one semiotics comes to stand for or represent another: 'a semiotics whose expression plane is another semiotics' (Eco 1976: 55).

The translation of meaning from one context to another has been commented on in a recent article by Hugh Mehan (1993). In that article, Mehan tracks the steps which lead from a teacher's interaction with a student-child, via the teacher's recording of a deviation on the child's part, toward (by means of an organizational procedure) a reconstruction of the child as a test result, and, finally, as a report in a file. It is upon the basis of these textual recontextualisations that ultimately decisions are made regarding the child's 'status':

Such texts, generated from a particular event in the sequential process (e.g., a testing encounter), become the basis of the interaction in the next step of the sequence (e.g., a placement committee meeting). These texts become divorced from the social interaction that created them as they move through the system,

institutionally isolated from the interactional practices that generated them in the preceding events. (Mehan 1993: 246)[1]

Mehan is concerned with a concerted 'construction of social reality' which traverses and exploits a range of modes and practices. As this construction unfolds, meanings 'become divorced from the social inter-action that created them'. Significantly then, with each step the process reconfigures the situation which it posited as its origin: an increasing number of people becomes involved; relevant meanings are committed to Minutes, reports, and files; letters and other forms of correspon-dence summarize and thereby 'authorize' those meanings, and so on. Thanks to that increasing distance from its origin, each recontextualiza-tion appears to add to the 'weight', the institutional importance, the authority, in short, the *facticity*, of what is said and written.

Latour has recently expressed related ideas using the terms 'shifting out' and 'degelation' (Latour 1992). Both of these terms aim to cap-ture what is at stake in the shift of meaning from, for example, someone asking those arriving to shut the door behind them, to a written notice saying 'Please keep this door closed', to a hydraulic door-closing device (Latour 1992: 250ff). Latour is crucially concerned with the intersemiotics at the heart of this displacement from talk, to writ-ing, to automatic device. The 'delegation' which Latour comments on concerns the 'translation' of the original request into increasingly exosomatic, mechanical, and factitious realities.

The present article proposes to deal with a similar set of 'fact'-producing transformations, and the focus here, as in Latour's article, is on how meanings are shifted across semiotic modes. It is argued that 'facts' are achieved not merely as stabilized, reified, or 'externalized' linguistic meanings (Martin 1993: 221ff; Potter 1996: 150), although these are a crucial part of what goes on. The construction of 'facts' also involves their transposition into increasingly durable and propagative semiotics, such as printed matter, technologized kinds of representa-tion such as architectural design, and even the organization of our spatial environment (Iedema 1997, 1999). In short, the social process of 'fact-construction' is shown here to extend from face-to-face talk to the ways in which we produce the structures that constitute and produce our social space (Lefebvre 1991).

Fact-construction is a major feature of processes taking place in formal organizations (Mumby 1993; Clegg 1993; Iedema 1996, 1997, 1999). In these contexts, (unstable) agreements reached in and through embodied talk are conventionally 'resemiotisized' into alternative and less negotiable semioses such as written summaries, courses of action,

or more durable materialities. Importantly, it is often thanks to their resemiotization that particular understandings and agreements attain organizational status, explicitness, and relevance. At the same time, mobilizing not just embodied resources (such as gesture, voice, facial expression) but resources from our material, exo-somatic environment, they may attain a naturalness and inconspicuousness (Saint-Martin 1995: 382–383). It is through resemiotisization, then, that organizationally relevant meanings are relegated from the relatively volatile sphere of embodied semiosis, into the naturalizing contexts of spatio-material semiosis (cf. Bourdieu 1994).

The organizational process described in this article was not free of contestation and conflict, and neither did the final outcome of the project unproblematically represent stakeholders' understandings and agreements. These interactive and conflictual aspects of the project are dealt with in detail elsewhere (Iedema 1997, 1999, 2000). At issue in this article is the *logic* of the planning process itself: the progressive resemiotization of organizational meaning away from the interactive sphere.

Planning as production process

Organizational planning generally aims to settle on agreements about at least some version of reality (Forester 1993). However, face-to-face planning meetings (depending to a degree on where they fit in to the ritual hierarchy) are not simply occasions where members achieve mutual understandings.[2] Crucially, planning is (or is expected to be) a *productive* site, aiming to consolidate or even implement in practice newly achieved and agreed meanings.

To exemplify how such resemiotisizing productivity was achieved in interaction, I will briefly focus on the first meeting of a mental hospital planning project. During this first meeting there were seven people present. One was the local health authority official. It was his responsibility to ensure that the renovation and extension of the mental hospital was carried out. There was the project manager, appointed to coordinate the project on a day-to-day basis. Then there was the architect-planner who had tendered for and won the contract to produce a planning report addressing the details of the renovation and extension, incorporating two-dimensional architectural designs. Also present were a second architect, an engineer-supplier, and an executive assistant, the only woman there. Finally, there was I, the 'socio-semiotic ethnographer'.

The meeting had its own complex dynamics (Iedema 1997, 1999, 2000). Relations and positionings were progressively established, identities and

tasks were negotiated and contested, and understandings were formed and challenged. Shortly into the meeting it became evident that the local health authority official was very anxious both to get the renovations started and contain the cost of the project. Quite early on he said 'Let's do this thing as quick as possible now that the department has set aside this money and the decision was made to do it'. He implied he was not particularly interested in involving all the user stakeholders as he is required to do by the client-oriented planning policy recently issued by the Department of Health. His priority was to attain a quick, cheap, and unproblematic resolution to the project.

This created a tension between him and the architect-planner. In his haste to get his job done, the official chose to regard the Department of Health policy as an ignorable formality. The architect-planner, by contrast, needed to make sure all stakeholders stayed 'on side'. He could not allow any of them to be unduly excluded or silenced, in case their opinions, interests, and influences manifested themselves at a later time during the project, when the chance for re-negotiation of the designs is minimal, because prohibitively expensive. This meant the architect-planner had to consult with all the stakeholders, including the users of the hospital (the nurses and doctors, as well as managers), before resource and space allocation decisions were finalized and the drawings done.

In the course of this first meeting, the architect-planner shifts positioning in line with his task of having to find out what people think and what the power structures are, and propose areas of common ground. His general aim is to 'satisfice' (Simon 1965) all stakeholders, and his reputation largely depends on his being able to construct 'satisficings' as firmly shared agreements.[3] In the talk, the architect-planner moves in effect from the position of enquirer and interviewer to the position of summarizer and concluder. This strategy included allowing the area health authority official to initially dictate the focus of the meeting (making 'cost' more prominent than 'stakeholder input') and not contesting that focus too directly; asking questions rather than making assertions, and suggesting answers to these questions without seeming too abrupt. After putting up with the health official's emphasis on costing and efficiency for at least an hour, the architect-planner finally formulates his proposed course of action, aiming to include all stakeholders. At this late stage of the meeting the official can only contest the architect-planner's concluding summary at the risk of tension and conflict.

It is worth illustrating how the architect-planner's shift in positioning manifests itself as a subtle mobilization of different linguistic resources, because it provides an apt metaphor for the other (inter-semiotic) shifts

which he achieves later. In Extract 1 below, he ('AP') elicits the others'
knowledge of initial stages of the project:

(Extract 1)
[Meeting 1, Phase 2[4]]
AP– Now can I can I just John can I just ask a couple of things, one is that, at
least try and fill in some gaps in history here, um, there are some other players
now, in the game, is that right, in 1992 there were different people, I'm talking
about the medical side of the thing, uh, …

Extract 1 shows how the architect-planner positions himself quite tenta-
tively, using questions ('can I just ask', 'is that right') and hesitations
('can I can I', 'um').

   Somewhat later, the architect-planner elicits how others see his own
role, again not presuming his own authority:

(Extract 2)
[Meeting 1, Phase 6]
AP– Could I ask then I guess basically what is going to happen with this exercise
it's gonna be [name first co-worker] and [name second co-worker] who are going
to do the architectural part of it, I'm really coming in specifically to pin down
the PDP [report] part of that

Then, again somewhat later, he asks the others at the meeting to say to
what extent they expect him to take government guidelines governing the
writing of planning reports seriously. In particular, he wants them to say
how important they rate his consultations with the ultimate users of the
proposed building.

(Extract 3)
[Meeting 1, Phase 7]
AP– … the PDP would have to be, at least technically, in accordance with the
guideline, the project … process guideline [?], and it calls for things like 'three
options' and, you know, all that sort of stuff, I guess what I need to know is,
to what extent … um, … do we want to go back to users and revisit them, do
we want to do this thing sort of in remote mode and roam around for comment,
I mean just to what extent do you guys feel we need to …, I mean there are
two sides to the argument, one is that um there is a series of users who may
want an opportunity who may want to look at it again, you may not want
'em to do that, but that may be the opportunity we've got, in which case we'll
then go through a fairly genuine process of looking at it, if there's a sense that
um everybody is basically happy with it and they're trying to kind of patch
it up and get it into line with the agreements and then press on, which I have a
sense is at least what [name health official] is anxious to do
Health Official– hm
AP– Do you have any sense at this point of which side of the fence we're sitting
on or …

Gradually, the architect-planner becomes more authoritative about the direction of the meeting ('I guess what I need to know is …'). Also, his turn at talk in Extract 3 is long, and he assumes the authority to express a judgment about his own consultations ('a fairly genuine process').

Extract 3 is most interesting, though, in that it shows how the architect-planner invites stakeholders to be explicit about their assessments of and assumptions about both the status of the government guidelines and the users' involvement in the planning process. Giving stakeholders this opportunity enables him to summarize their views in his own words at the end of the meeting. His summary formulation is offered at a point where organizational etiquette, the meeting's staging and structure, but also the architect-planner's subtle emphasis on the importance of government regulation, and the appearance of genuine understanding and appreciation, all militate against its challenge. In this way, the architect-planner in effect binds those present to an abstract formulation which at once transcends as well as marginalizes specific individuals' views and understandings:

(Extract 4)
[Meeting 11; Phase 11]
AP– We will have to go back to stakeholders, whatever we do, both in the Department I think and in the hospital, and at least run our ideas past, to this stage again
HO– Hmhm.
AP– So we'll have to have some meetings with those people

It is thus that the architect-planner integrates a variety of stakeholders' concerns into the one linguistic clause (Figure 1), authoritatively spelling out his conclusion to the preceding discussion ('will have to').
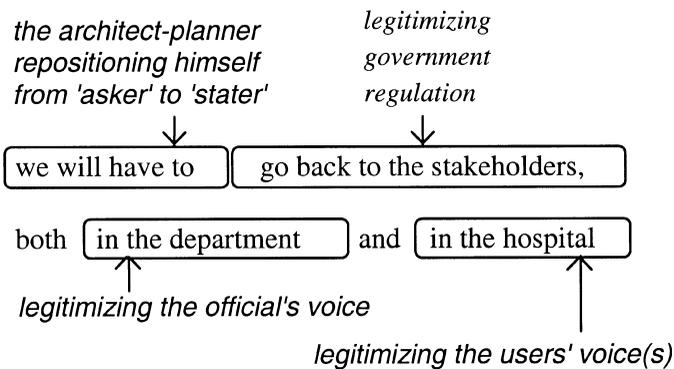

Figure 1.   *Repositioning himself, the architect-planner brings three different voices together*

Importantly, the focus of contention — that is, who and how many stakeholders are to be consulted during the project — is lexicalized as an indication of place: 'both *in* the department and *in* the hospital' (Halliday 1994: 23 and 188). In linguistic parlance, such place indicators are unlikely to ever get promoted to the status of Subject of the clause. This means that their being taken up as the focus of subsequent talk would be extremely marked (cf. Halliday 1994: 76; Martin 1992: 461). The issue is thereby worded as being beyond negotiation.[5] It is as it were harnessed lexico-grammatically against challenge, and in that sense aims to predispose those present towards accepting the resolution it offers.

In addition to this, the architect-planner's utterance semantically metonymizes the stakeholders (Wilden 1987: 196). They are not named by function, as in 'Department of Health officials', 'doctors', 'nurses', but by their place of employment: 'the department', 'the hospital' (Leeuwen 1993). This semantic tactic resembles the lexicogrammatical one just discussed, in that it renders any challenge to the architect-planner's utterance highly marked. Seen from this angle, the architect-planner's formulation is less a faithful summary of what was said, than a deliberate construal of a state of affairs linguistically brought into being.

The health official in fact declined to challenge the architect-planner's formulation of his task at this late stage in the meeting, and at such an early stage in the project. He may have been aware that the formulation was offered at a point where it would have been indecorous of him to challenge it, and he may have thought he might find a chance to set things straight later. There were times of near-open conflict later during the project centring around whose voices were to be accorded status. In each case, the architect-planner's subtle language use and his acute sense of meeting dynamics prevented break-down.

From talk to architectural design

Insofar as that the architect-planner's formulation considered above construes a state of affairs rather than just reflect one, it resembles similar construals which smooth over differences at later stages of the project. For example, there was disparity between the talk and the way it became summarized as 'Minutes of the Meetings', and between the 'Minutes' and the final planning report (Iedema 1997). A similarly tenuous relation also existed between the report and the architectural design.

In Figure 2 I have compressed the resemiotization trajectory of one aspect of the project into one diagram. It shows how one official's ('OH')

meeting 4

OH- Can I just … here because cause some of the other units were designed … have always … committing patients to come through quite separately
AP- Oh I bet
U- They did but we also thought of saving on having two reception areas, so we [still want a separate entrance but near the]
OH- [You don't you don't need you don't need] the extra staff, …
U- Again we were only working off the plan
OH- Right
U- Um, but yes basically we do want it to be kept separately, so that eh the other patients don't get sort of affected by people who were brought in
AP2- We were briefed to have one central access point for vehicles and pedestrian traffic, um, and uh but have two reception functions, and also for the ambulances and the police cars would have an extra emergency a special where they all arrive it's all in one area if the access is slightly separated
U- Slightly separated
AP2- Currently on the plan they're right across the other side of building
B- Is yours …
AP2- Yes that's right, and they'll be sharing the interview/waiting/internment …
B- I think on that original design it didn't quite yet … what you asked for
A- We're maintaining the existing entry, here
B- Yeah, and that was the problem
A- So so people come into a common lobby, and then then the committed patients are immediately get taken across
AP2- Yeah there's two
U- Yeah yeah so there's a separate entrance for the committed patients, they're separate but in the same area
A- … not even a comon lobby?
U- Not even a common lobby
A- Oh I see
OH- They actually can't come in through a common lobby
AP2- So rather than having two access points … we can have one point but separate eh doors
A- Uh yeah

PDP

The patient admission area needs to be accessible by vehicle and needs to be close to the secure unit to allow discrete transfer of patients. A seclusion room should be accessible from both the admission area and the secure unit

design

staff

HO=health official
B=bureaucrat
AP=architect-planner
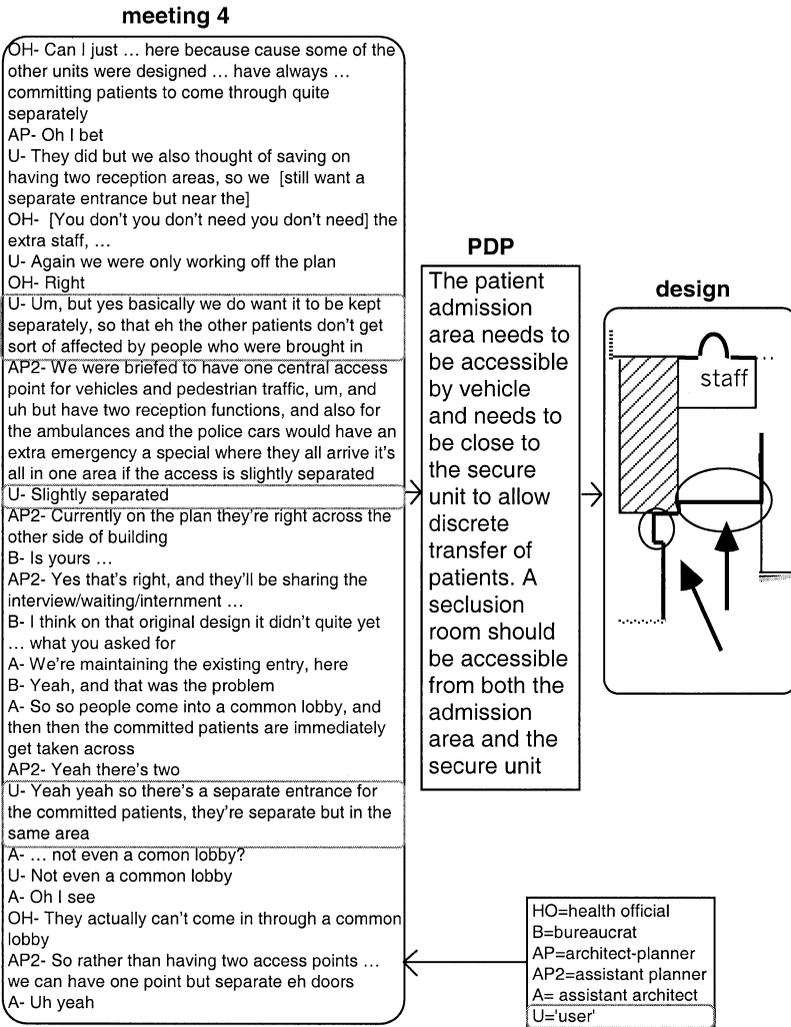AP2=assistant planner
A= assistant architect
U='user'

Figure 2.   *From talk to print to design. Used by permission of Günther Narr Verlag*

concern about separate entrances for dangerous and harmless patients is taken up by the users ('U'), then integrated into the architect-planner's Project Definition Plan report, and ultimately integrated into the architectural design. While the talk is personalized ('we do want it to be kept separately'; 'they'll be sharing …'), the written report has been depersonalized ('The patient admission area needs to be accessible';

'A seclusion room should be accessible …'), the architectural draw-ing technicalizes these meanings, and the constructed building itself ultimately spatializes these behavioral constraints.

As Figure 2 shows, with each step the process shifts its focal point towards increasingly durable semiotic manifestations, while at the same time increasingly distancing itself from 'the social interaction that created it'. This process stabilizes the meanings at stake, insofar as that it distances itself from here-and-now, face-to-face talk, and re-invents itself in the shape of specialized and authoritative discourses, expert practices and technological equipments, and spatial structures.

It is not meant to suggest that the meanings of such emergent artifacts are necessarily and always less contested, dispersed, or uncertain than the meanings of spoken utterances, facial expressions, or other embodied realizations. As Mary Douglas notes,

We do not escape from the predicaments that language prepares for us by turn-ing away from the semiotics of words to the semiotics of objects. It would be illusory to hope that objects present us with a more solid, unambiguous world. (Douglas 1992: 6–7)

What is at issue here is that emergent and exosomatic artifacts are likely to occupy a different position in human communication compared to that of embodied meaning making. Due to their technologization and abstraction away from dynamic interaction, artifacts may accrue a valid-ity and an authority, while at the same time, thanks to their material stability, simulating a naturalness and an unobtrusiveness.[6] By way of analogue, the circumstantial elements in the architect-planner's utter-ance 'we will have to go back to the stakeholders both in the depart-ment and in the hospital' construed individual stakeholders as aspects of context, and thereby aimed to obviate challenge and re-negotiation. Similarly, meanings invested in exosomatic resources predispose us towards regarding their exosomatic aspect as providing the context rather than the focus for our interactions. In some sense, exo-somatic realms store meanings that have 'settled', thereby perpetuating the kinds of social relations and understandings that gave rise to them across time and space (Callon and Latour 1981: 283; Giddens 1984: 261).

From writing to architectural design

[A] building or a city might be considered as a quasi-permanent record of behavioral stage-directions or scorings, a rich, multi-channel set of directions

suggesting culturally appropriate spatial behaviors, orientations, and interactions. (Preziosi 1984: 52)

An important point to make here is that each resemiotization transposes meanings from one semiotic mode into one which is different. Each semiotic will have its own specific (systemic) constraints and affordances. The things we can do with language, for example, can't all be done in visual representation, and vice versa (Saint-Martin 1995: 387; Kress and Leeuwen 1996: 37). A semiotic mode is therefore hard pressed to provide an unproblematic, transparent, and accurate translation for the meanings from another mode. Transposition between different semiotics inevitably introduces discrepancy, and resemiotization is necessarily a process which produces not exact likenesses, but which represents 'a multi-channel set of directions'; that is a (semiotic) *metaphor*.

The metaphorical nature of these shifts may be exemplified by reference to how the architectural designs aimed to resolve problems articulated in language. While the architect-planner worked to conceive of stakeholders' 'agreements' in such a way as to render them immune to challenge and re-negotiation in drafting his Project Definition Plan report, he and another architect had already started the re-design of the mental hospital. Important considerations here included technical issues. For example, how could mobile alarm systems be used and still allow staff to easily locate the site of an emergency. Other considerations were geophysical: How could the drop on one side of the hospital site be avoided, and how could the impact of the fierce Sydney sun on the hospital's windows be minimized. Then there were practical considerations: How could we avoid criminal and violent patients having to share the hospital's foyer with non-violent patients.

The alarm system comprised devices which staff would carry around their necks (out of reach of patients) and which they could press in emergency situations. To facilitate visibility, audibility, and access through the corridors in such situations, a star-like design was proposed for the building with an observation station at its center. Three of the hospital's main wings thus converged upon the central observation station (see Figure 2; cf. Bentham's-Foucault's 'panopticon'; Foucault 1977). In addition, the dangerous-patients wing was laid out with separate rooms, each of which could also be monitored from the observation station.

In that way the architects solved as best they could the complementary requirements of a mobile alarm system, supervisory control, and quick access to staff in trouble. Staff caught inside one of the patients'

rooms or outside of the building's panoptic center might have difficulty in attracting supervisory attention, but that was the price paid for placing the alarm buttons not along the walls (accessible to patients), but on chains worn around health workers' necks.

The geophysical contours of the site meant that the renovations needed to be designed such that they required the least possible alteration of the site. One wing extension was therefore proposed to be built diagonally onto the main existing building, on top of the appropriate contour. While this obviated the need to build supports or do excavations, it meant the new wing was facing north (that is, in southern hemisphere terms, facing the midday sun). To overcome the problem of overheating during summer, a compromise was found by 'stepping' the extension (constructing the walls of the wing such as to face either east or west) to minimize the windows' exposure to the light (see Figure 3).
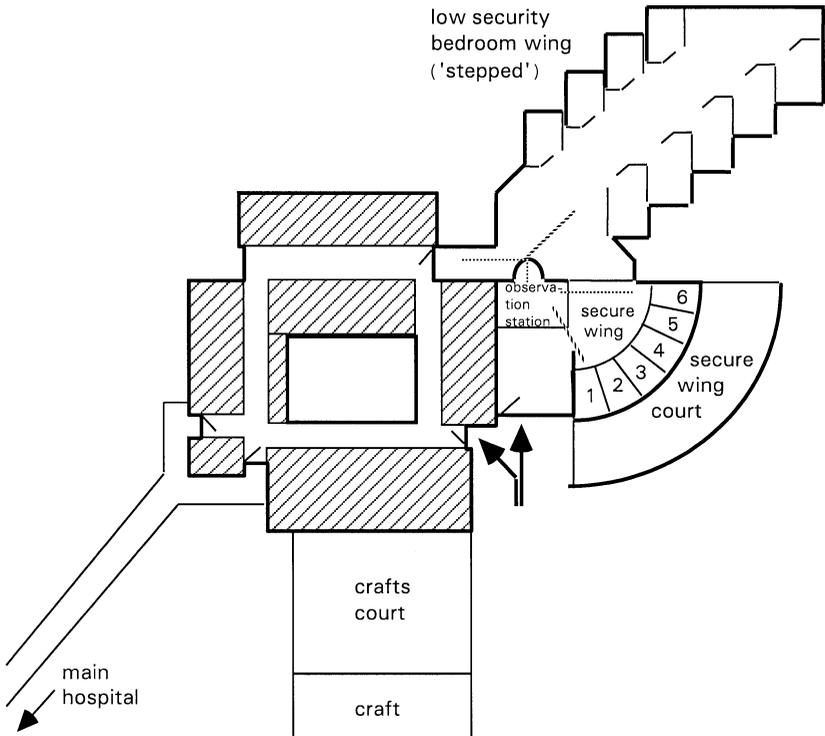
Figure 3.   *Proposed hospital renovation (two-dimensional design; approximate). Used by permission of JTCW + Forbes Health Consultants*

Apart from these technical and spatial compromises, a solution needed to be found to keep criminal patients away from the main traffic of the hospital. A second entrance was therefore included to prevent harmless patients from having to mingle with or even see the dangerous, violent, and criminal patients. The negotiated result was as follows. In Figure 3, the shaded area represents the old part of the building. The non-shaded area represents the proposed renovation (two-dimensional design).

Thus, the resulting design represents a confluence of (i) technical-practical compromises; (ii) site usage suiting the geophysical contours and minimizing excavation and the building of overhangs, and (iii) architectural-structural conceptions which are seen to best accommodate the principles and requirements governing THE-practice of mental patient supervision. The design is in that sense a *metaphor* which reconfigures into a unique solution a range of expectations, affordances and practices, subject to the constraints of the semiotics which realize it.

Since each semiotic mode entails divergent affordances and constraints, each step, from talk to writing, from writing to design, or from design to building, is an approximation, a compromise, or a semiotic metaphor. The project's ultimate outcome then is a specialized technology which metaphorizes individual stakeholders' understandings and expectations, governmental regulations, institutional practices and rules, and technical and geophysical constraints, into a structure which is most likely to exceed as well as counter in some way people's original intentions (Latour 1996).

Conclusion

The general principle which has been under focus in this article is one where salient meanings' realizations are rendered increasingly difficult to renegotiate and change. The kind of organizational process described here stabilizes specific meanings and in doing so resemiotisizes those meanings into more durable manifestations. In exemplifying this, the article considered how contested issues were placed beyond negotiation and were stabilized by means of grammatical structures which require extra linguistic work for them to be recuperated into interactive negotiation. It also looked at how specialized ways of talking and writing became transposed into and compromised by the details and the affordances and limits of the design.

The planning project as a whole then can be seen to weave people and their meanings into increasingly reified, complex, and obdurate semiotics.

As a first step, the planner's written report (his Project Definition Plan) constitutes a summary of the agreements reached during the meetings. Essentially, the shift from talk to writing is one where the original mode (talk) becomes rematerialized as print. Printed written text is harder to negotiate, not only because the writer is generally not present to answer questions or change formulations, but also because written registers are generally more abstract and generalizing than spoken ones (Halliday 1985; Olson 1994).

Subsequently, the architect-planner's design proposals rendered the compromise understandings achieved in talk and in writing into architectural design form. Once the designing began the project reached 'the point of no return' and architectural changes could only be made at extraordinary cost. The planner's resemiotizations from talk into print, and from print into design therefore marked near-irrevocable steps, semiotically and practically, embedding the project outcome in an increasingly durable and resistant materiality.

The article's aim has been to show how the different semiotic modes are linked on the basis of a resemiotisizing logic, and how each step is strategically exploited in the organizational planning setting explored here. In this description, the planning process is a specialized means, or a technique, which produces constraints on the negotiability of precisely those meaning-materiality complexes which ultimately serve to sustain and bolster its community of practice and production.

In sum, it is through this process of resemiotization that the community transposes and reifies its knowledges, techniques and technologies, as well as its interpersonal, social and cultural practices and positionings.[7] It is in that sense, that, as well as embodying assumptions about the world,

[physical structures] embody social relations in materials more durable than those of face-to-face interaction. (Law and Mol 1995: 281)

Notes

1. Mehan 1993 describes how a handicapped student is progressively recontextualized as a social category — 'intellectually disabled':

    After a teacher and students interact in the classroom (discourse), the teacher fills out a form (text). That text is introduced into the discourse of the School Appraisal Team (SAT) meeting. From the discourse of the participants in that meeting, another piece of text is generated, this time a 'summary of recommendation', which instructs the school psychologist to begin educational testing. The administration of the educational test transpires as face-to-face interaction between tester and student. Based on that

discourse, the tester writes a report. That text is sent to the placement committee, where it becomes part of the file, which, representing the child, becomes the basis of the final placement decision. (Mehan 1993: 246)

2. It is not implied here that agreements and 'mutual understandings' are necessarily always equitable, or even fully understood insofar as the details and consequences are concerned. As Garfinkel noted, 'It is misleading and incorrect to think of an agreement as an actuarial device' (Garfinkel 1967: 74).

3. The term 'satisficing' aims to bring out the arbitrary nature of such agreements. Stakeholders may not have the knowledge, time, or courage to question particular inter-actionally constructed 'agreements', which are therefore approximate in a discourse, in a practical, political, as well as a cognitive sense.

4. 'Phase' here refers to a chunk of talk, made cohesive by its ideational focus, its interpersonal tenor, or other structural aspects (Gregory 1995).

5. Compare 'users will be consulted', which foregrounds the point of contention and opens it up for challenge: 'Will they?'

6. Another crucial issue is access to the means and resources of resemiotization (production), of course.

7. This constructivism is therefore not a kind of idealism (cf. Latour 1993: 395): the logic of social construction described here is not a translation of abstract contents into material forms (expressions), but a transposition of ephemeral content-expression (meaning-materiality) complexes into more durable context-expression (meaning-materiality) complexes (and vice versa).

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