

LETTER FROM HUMBERTO MATURANA TO HEINZ VON FOERSTER 5
FEBRUARY 1973

Rogomont (sp?) asked me to clarify the distinction I made between the terms structure and organization in an interaction after my talk. This I did by indicating that structure is used to refer to emphasize the components and their relation when talking about a whole; while organization is used to emphasize the role the components have in the constitution of a whole, and, hence, refers to the relations which constitute a unity. Thus, two systems are equivalent if they have the same organization even if they have a different structure, or a system retains its identity while its organization stays invariant, even though its structure changes as happens in living systems through their ontogeny. An interesting clarification is that the distinction makes it obvious that whenever there is a change in organization there is a change of system; or, in other words, that the identity of a system is bound to the invariance of its organization. The traditional difficulty in talking about a whole and its relations to the parts or components obviously stems from the confusion of structure with organization. The properties of the whole are determined by its organization, while its structure is determined by the properties of its parts, hence it is obvious that the properties of the whole are not to be found in the properties of the parts.