CULTURAL POLITICS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Social Constructionism, Rhetoric and Knowing of the Third Kind

JOHN SHOTTER

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Preface

This book is about ways of knowing in terms of feeling and feelings. When I first left school, I went to work as an engineering apprentice in an aircraft factory. Two memories of that time are relevant to its contents. One is to do with filing different metals in the appentice's workshop. I remember now the oily slipperiness of brass, the way soft aluminium tore and clogged the file, the hard crumbliness of cast iron, the utterly intransigent nature of stainless steel, but the yielding friendliness of mild steel such that file and material seemed to have been made for each other. It was as if, with the file, I could 'feel into' the very crystalline structure of the metals themselves. Hammering was different, and revealed different properties in the materials. Other tools worked to reveal yet further characteristics. The other memory is to do with the fact that we thousand or so workers trooped in at 7.30 a.m., through a single little door at the back of the factory, jostling and pushing each other to make sure we clocked in on time, as every minute late cost us 15 minutes' pay. The 'staff' (management, drawing office, administrative, and other such personnel) and the Royal Air Force officer customers, came in ('strolled in' we thought) through big double doors at the front, up imposing steps, at 9.00 a.m. But more than that, 'they' had their lunch on a mezzanine floor raised five feet above 'us' in the lunch room; 'they' had waitress service and white tableclothes, 'we' buttered sliced bread straight from the paper packet on the formica top of the table; and so on. 'They' didn't just look down on 'us', 'they' treated 'us' like about-to-be-naughty children. Such incidents as these were paradigmatic of the thousand other small daily "hidden injuries of class" (Sennett and Cobb, 1972), or "degradation ceremonies" (Garfinkel, 1956) that then – in the 1950s (and for the next decade) – were an integral part of the British industrial scene, marked, as it was, by a large number of strikes, and a general level of anger, resentment and widespread bloody-mindedness expressed by all.

Looking back upon these little degradations, I was intrigued to realize that, while 'we' on the workshop floor had 'gone on' about these and other little incidents almost continually, the staff had seemed impervious to the fact that our anger was occasioned by their behaviour, their 'perks' (why should they care, they deserved them, didn't they?). As I came to realize, that is a part of the phenomenology of

power: those who have it are least aware of it, for the world 'offers no resistances' to them and their desires. Only those without such power are aware of its workings 'in' the resistances they meet in trying to realize their desires. But I was also intrigued by the fact that, when workers had returned to the floor, seething, after a brush with management, and everyone had said "Oh, you've just got to complain about that," no one ever did. In the end, it seemed too trivial, and one knew it would be useless. To complain, for instance, about the windows in the men's toilets – put there so that the foreman could see that what was being done there was being done properly, and not wasting time – to complain just by saying "Well, I don't like being watched at those times," seemed both inadequate to the anger and unlikely to be effective. But what else could one say? Our rage was impotent rage; we didn't even know where our anger came from, so to speak. There seemed to be no adequate language within which express *why* we had become so angry, to explain why these little degradations mattered so much to us. And this, I suspect, made us even more angry, for we also became angry at ourselves, for trivializing ourselves at being so bothered by such trivial things.

It was hard to realize – and to sustain one's excitement at the fact – that the factory was in the business of building some of the most amazing engineering triumphs of the day. I have great admiration for engineers, and I still have; some of their feats are truly heroic (as well as some of their 'mistakes') – no doubt about it – but I left after one year, to return to school to become a mathematician, so that I could become 'staff', too. I was sixteen at the time. Then, I never thought that I would be writing a book like this, a book that in fact connects these two memories in two different ways. One way is to do with how (a) the 'feeling into' the hidden inner structure of materials *through* the use of a tool like a file, connects with (b) *sensing* the (also supposedly hidden) inner structure of the social world *through* the use of words-as-prosthetic-devices. But that, indeed, is one thing that this book is about. The other is to do with how (a) our lack of words to express how and why these 'trivial' things matter so much to us, connects with (b) how we still do not quite understand how to articulate the way these small things work to influence us in our feelings as to 'who' we are, that is, to influence us 'in' our identities. We still do not know how what one might call the self–other dimension of interaction works to 'construct' another dimension of interaction, seemingly independent of it – that between oneself as an individual person, and 'one's own world' – such that, if one feels oneself reduced as a person, one feels oneself as living in a reduced world.

But why do we still find it so difficult to appreciate the way in which these (horizontal, if you like) self–other interactions work to 'construct' for each of us, that (vertical) person–world dimension of interaction in terms of which, as individuals, we make sense of our own unique circumstances? With apologies for the 'sexist' (and 'Enlightenment') terminology within which the issue was then framed, I set the scene for this project in an earlier 1975 book as follows:

> Men have created and are still creating the characteristics of their own humanity. It has been produced, not as a result of evolutionary processes – processes that produce changes of a biological kind – for men seem to have stayed biologically constant for some time. Its development must be considered to be a historical, cultural one, a matter not of natural processes but of human imagination, choice and effort. And in 'inheriting' this manmade nature, this 'second nature', men's children do not inherit it genetically like blue eyes, but like the houses and cities, the tools and other more material artifacts they have fashioned, and besides teaching them skills at using these they teach them skills at fashioning more. Children 'inherit' their humanity, then, in a process of communication which takes place after birth . . . What has been overlooked in modern psychology, especially in its more extreme mechanistic-behaviouristic manifestations as a natural science of behaviour, is that man is not simply a being immersed directly in nature but is a being *in a culture* in nature. Thus people must not be treated like organisms that respond directly in relation to their position in the world, but as rather special organic forms which deal with nature in terms of their knowledge of the 'position' in a culture; that is, in terms of a knowledge of the part their actions play in relation to the part played by other people's actions in maintaining (or progressing) the culture.
>
> (Shotter, 1975: 13–14)

It is precisely the attempt to understand what it is to act from within a 'position' in a culture, that entails focusing upon the nature of the third kind of knowing I want to discuss. It is not a seemingly decontextualized knowing 'that,' or knowing 'how,' but a knowing 'from within' a situation or circumstance. That is, instead of being concerned with how, as *already* an individual of a certain kind, one gains theoretical or practical knowledge relevant to acting within the situation one finds oneself in, it is concerned with the kind of knowledge involved in one *being* a person of this or that kind – and the kind of situation one finds onself in as a result.

How might knowledge of this 'ontological' kind best be characterized? I argue (in Part II) that it has a 'developmental' quality to it: that it begins with a certain kind of 'feeling' – not to be confused with an emotion, which is to do with an evaluation of or an orientation towards one's own state of being, expressed in terms of feelings of sadness or anger, etc. – related to one's *socio-cultural* surroundings, just as if, rather than visually observing them, one were 'in touch with' them in some way; and that it involves a two-way process of *formulation* in which such feelings are 'given' or 'lent' a form 'from within' an occasion or situation that arises within the flow of activity constituting a discourse or speech genre (Bakhtin – see Chapter 6). This has a number of implications. First, it is important to notice that such 'feelings' are of an *ethical* nature: they not only indicate what the others around us might or might not 'allow' us to do – we can give our 'feelings' expression in a morally negotiated way, in a way 'approved' in a step-by-step manner in interaction with those around us – but also what it is about our own 'position' for which we alone can be 'answerable' (to use a term of Bakhtin's). Such 'feelings', I suggest (Chapter 3), are what Vico (1968) calls the 'sensory topics' which provide the 'roots' of a 'civil

society'; they constitute the shared sense (*sensus communis*) which arises among a social group who already share a set of circumstances – and it is against the background of such feelings as these that any conceptualization of what we take our human nature to be can be judged for its adequacy.

But second, it is the 'developmental' nature of 'knowing from' which opens it up to an enormous range of different influences, and thus to different forms of investigation – centrally, its 'developmental' nature opens it up to a process of testing and checking, of justifying and warranting, of accrediting and legitimating, which bear upon its 'hook-up', so to speak, to the realities within which it is used (Chapter 4). As Austin (1970: 179) puts it, the question it opens up is that of "what is the detail of the complicated internal machinery we use in 'acting' – the receipt of intelligence, the appreciation of the situation, the invocation of principles, the planning, the control of execution and the rest?" For even the simplest, smoothest, most thoughtless social act – if it is to be appropriate to its circumstances – is a 'skilled' performance which must involve what I have called (see Chapter 5) a form of 'ethical logistics', that is, a process of 'managing' who is responsible for what in transacting the negotiation of a meaning. To investigate its details, Austin recommends the study of 'breakdowns' in the process, and in particular those in which *excuses* are offered, for as is so often the case,

> the abnormal will throw light on the normal, will help us to penetrate the blinding veil of ease and obviousness that hides the mechanism of the natural successful act. It rapidly becomes plain that the breakdowns signalized by the various excuses are of radically different kinds, affecting different parts or stages of the machinery, which the excuses consequently pick out and sort out for us.
>
> (Austin, 1970: 179)

What this means, I think, is that the claim (in mainstream psychology) that our cognitive abilities operate mechanically and systematically, requires serious reconsideration. Instead, if the comments above are true, they should be treated as reflecting in their functioning the same essentially rhetorical and ethical considerations as those influencing the transactions between people out in the world (see Chapter 6). From this changed point of view, it interesting to consider again how Austin (1970: 193) justifies his study of mere words, and what is going on in 'doing things' with them: for, by studying why some words are used rather than others, one can

> pick out the internal machinery of doing actions, or the departments into which the doing of actions is organized. There is for example the stage at which we actually *carry out* some action upon which we embark – perhaps we have to make certain bodily movements or to make a speech. In the course of actually *doing* these things (getting weaving [for instance]) we have to pay (some) attention to what we are doing and to take (some) care to guard against (likely) dangers: we may need to use judgement or tact: we must exercise sufficient control over our bodily parts: and so on. Inattention, carelessness, errors of judgement, tactlessness, clumsiness, all these and others are ills (with attendant excuses) which affect one specific stage in the machinery of action, the *executive* stage, the stage where we *muff* it. But there are many other departments in the business too, each of which is to be traced and mapped through its cluster of verbs and adverbs. Obviously there are departments of intelligence and planning, of decision and resolve, and so on . . .

And if we interpret all this now, not in the instrumental, logically neutral fashion in which Austin clearly intended, but as all going on within an ethically and politically sensitive environment, in which the dangers and other ills to which we must attend are not ones of a merely technical kind, then we can see how it gives us a method useful to us. It is 'in' words-in-their-speaking that we can find the political and ethical influences of interest to us at work.

To take this approach to 'mind' then – that it is not a mysterious inner mechanism of a mechanical and general kind, operating according to its own universal *lingua mentis*, but that it is a cultural production, reflecting in its make-up different ethically and politically structured modes of operation in different circumstances – is to honour, it seems to me, Vico's claim quoted in the epigraph in the Introduction to this book: "the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our human mind." Where the founding context, so to speak, of all our other modes of thought, is to be found within that third kind of knowing I have called 'knowing from.'

knowing from (not how or what)

· INTRODUCTION ·

Traditions of argumentation and knowing of the third kind

> In the night of thick darkness enveloping earliest antiquity, so remote from ourselves, there shines the eternal and never failing light of a truth beyond all question: that the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our human mind. Whoever reflects on this cannot but marvel that the philosophers should have bent all their energies to the study of the world of nature, which since God made it He alone knows; and that they should have neglected the study of the world of nations, or civil world, which, since men made it, men could come to know.
>
> (Vico, 1968: para. 331)

This book explores both our academic and our everyday ways of knowing. It is especially concerned with the nature of the 'background' upon which we draw in formulating not only our claims in everyday conversation, but also the disciplinary discourses within we discuss our claims to academic knowledge. The themes explored go against the grain of much in the tradition of thought embodied in the modern social sciences. In particular, the central theme of the book – that our disciplined ways of knowing are founded or 'rooted' in, and relevant to, rhetorically organized, two-sided, everyday traditions of argumentation – will seem to many to be especially shocking, not least because it assigns only an ephemeral nature to such disciplines. And their astonishment will be intensified when I add that, indeed, when seen in this light, the 'human sciences' now appear to be increasingly irrelevant to our times, to the pressing social issues of the day. For they are quintessentially products of a moment in the history of the West, the Modern age (Foucault, 1970), that is now passing, if not already over.[1] But to speak against science, and for tradition and for rhetoric, in this way is especially startling, for both the latter have been particularly disdained in modern times.

Respect for tradition has been seen as tantamount to a respect for prejudice, while rhetoric has been seen as "mere rhetoric," as having to do only with the adornment

of speech in an effort to make it unreasonably persuasive. But, as Gadamer (1975: 240) says, "the prejudice against prejudice itself . . . deprives tradition of its power," while, as Billig (1987) has pointed out, the prejudice against rhetoric has also deprived it of its power, for it has led us to ignore its two-sided, argumentative nature, that is, the fact that those subjected to the claims of others can, if given the opportunity, justify answering back with equal and opposite claims. The 'prejudices' of modernity have made it difficult for us rationally to 'see' the role of such two-sided, argumentative (rhetorical) traditions in our daily social lives, and the way we justify our more professional academic activities in their terms.

The 'human sciences' were formed from within a social world which, at the time of their formation (see the section on the Enlightenment below), had a certain orderly and unitary 'style' to it, a widespread 'sameness' that no longer seems to be the case in the more disorderly, pluralistic, postmodern world we now inhabit. Thus, just as those in the natural sciences crucially assumed the uniformity of nature as a prerequisite to their investigations, so the originators of the 'human sciences' also assumed the 'background' of their social lives together to be uniform. The idea that we might live in a differentiated social world, a world containing regions and moments so different from each other as to allow the formulation of equal and opposite claims as to their nature – in line with Billig's (1987) claims about the two-sided nature of everyday, common-sense knowledge above – was unthinkable to them. For them, the world of the rich man and poor woman, the happy woman and the sad man, was everywhere the same. Thus, how could this uniform 'background' be of importance? If it exerted no differential effects upon their behaviour (and thought), how could its effects be detected?

However, times are changing. And if we apply the central theme already mentioned above, we can perhaps see that, as our ways of relating ourselves to each other start to change, so must our ways of knowing begin to change, too. Thus, as we begin to confront the *others* in the world around us as genuine 'others' who possess an otherness worthy of our interest and respect (unlike the 'indistinguishable atoms' in a natural science), so our ways of knowing must begin (and have begun[2]) to diversify also. Now, we do need to know about the nature of the 'backgrounds', the different forms of life from which our different ways of knowing emerge. Can our 'human sciences' help us in this task? Theoretically, yes. For the aim of a science *is* to describe the unity and coherence of its subject matter. Yet this is just what the modern 'human sciences' have notably failed to do. They have provided us with an ever increasing wealth of fragmentary data, but as yet no overall grasp either of our own mental functioning or of the nature of our everyday social lives. But this is not to do with the fact that we have not yet found the correct theory – as if with yet more research effort (and funds) we shall one day get it right. It is to do with the fact that we have failed to grasp not only what it is that we must 'theorize' here, but also what the task of 'theory' in this sphere is like. Indeed, as Taylor (1987: 477) remarks: "We cannot turn the background from which we think into an object for us. The task of reason has to be conceived quite differently." It must now be seen "as including – alongside the familiar forms of the Enlightenment – a new

department, whose excellence consists in our being able to articulate the background of our lives perspicuously" (Taylor, 1987: 480–1).

"Joint action" and "knowing from within"

It is at this point that we can make contact with 'knowing of the third kind'. It reflects the claim made by Vico above: that we have neglected in our philosophies the study of a special kind of knowledge, quite different from that provided us in our sciences of the natural world. The natural sciences are concerned with us (as individuals) discovering the nature of already existing states of affairs. The knowledge of which Vico speaks (as we shall see in more detail below) is not to do with our discovering actualities individually, but with our realizing the possibilities we make available to ourselves, between ourselves socially – where either others, or we ourselves, have made the relevant *provisions* or *resources* required for their realization already available in their, or our, previous social activities together. In this sense, the two-sided traditions constituting such a civil society are both lived and living traditions. As MacIntyre (1981: 207) says, a tradition is a "living" tradition in the sense that it "is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition," and thus to an extent, it is developed and developing tradition. On the other hand, such traditions are also "lived," in the sense that the resources required for maintaining them in existence, as socio-historically ongoing arguments, are continuously renewed and sustained in their own very conduct.

Thus the knowledge they embody is a strange kind of knowledge that can never be completely present in the head of any one of the individuals involved in its use. It only makes its appearance in the 'background' of our social activities. It is this kind of knowledge – of the provisions and resources we make available to ourselves for the realization of our different possible next forms of social behaviour – that is the special kind of knowledge embodied in the world of a civil society. And it is this that we must try to understand: both the nature of these socio-historical resources, and the nature of the social activities in which they are produced.

For me, the project of attempting to characterize the nature of this special kind of knowledge began in 1969, under the influence of Vygotsky (1962, 1986) and Mead (1934), before I was aware of Vico's existence. Then, I formulated its aim in ethical terms as being simply that of trying to understand what it is to be a responsible, autonomous human being, of trying to understand our own human making of our own human nature (Shotter, 1970, 1974a and b, 1975, 1980, 1984; Gauld and Shotter, 1977). Influenced now, both by Vico's concern with "civil society," and more explicitly by the issues of "otherness" mentioned above (exhibited politically now in so many places, both local and global, around the world), I have become more concerned with political issues, and what it is to be a citizen and to have a sense of *belonging* in a community, rather than merely being a legal part of it (see especially Chapter 9).

From 1980 onwards, central to my project has been the concept of "joint action"

(Shotter, 1980; but see also Chapters 3 and 7 of this book). It designates a third category of activities (or events?) lying in a zone of uncertainty somewhere in between the other two spheres of interest that have occupied our attention in the past. It lies neither wholly in the category of human *actions* (what 'I' as an individual agent do, explained by my giving my reasons) nor in that of natural *events* (what merely 'happens' to, in, or around me, outside my agency as an individual to control, explained by their causes), but shares (as we shall see) features of both. It is its very lack of specificity, its lack of any predetermined final form, and thus its openness to being specified or determined by those involved in it, that is the central defining feature of joint action. Without going into the concept in detail here, it is worth pointing out that the need for such a concept arises when human action is viewed not as the deliberate execution of a well-defined sequence of component actions – as in the monologic following of a script or plan – but when we act spontaneously, say, on the basis of what we 'vaguely felt' was 'required by the situation' we were in at the time.[3] Although we do not find it easy in such cases to give a well-articulated account of why we acted as we did, we would still claim to be acting sensibly, in a way appropriate to our circumstances.

The most obvious circumstance in which such joint action occurs is in dialogue with others, when one must respond by formulating appropriate utterances in reply to *their* utterances. What they have already said constitutes the 'situation on hand', so to speak, into which one must direct one's own reply. It is thus clear why, in such circumstances, we as individuals do not quite know why it is that we act as we do: rather than speaking 'out of' an inner plan (or mental representation), we speak 'into' a context not of our own making, that is, not under our own immediate control. Thus the formative influences shaping our actions are not there wholly within us, prior to our actions, available to be brought out ahead of time. Thus here, our interest is not in the structure of "already spoken words" (in *sentences*, as in linguistics), but in "words in their speaking" (in *utterances*, as I shall explain below). For, the actions of others are just as determinative of our conduct as anything within ourselves. Indeed, the outcome of joint action (within our current individualistic/scientistic ideology) is seen as coming 'out of nowhere' – indeed, people's experiences on a 'Ouija' board are typical of the outcomes of joint action. And in that sense, in being unattributable to an individual agent and open (as mentioned above) to being specified or determined by those involved in it, it can seem to be either a *creative* event; an accidental, *unintended consequence* of the interaction; or, a just-happening, impersonal event attributable to an 'external' cause or agency, according to the circumstances of its occurrence.

Indeed, in this respect, even when all alone, writing down our 'thoughts' on paper, the situation is not dissimilar to us interacting with an 'other'. Here, too, each sentence works to specify a certain aspect of a situation-as-the-author-understands-it; and each word, too, seems required by what, of that situation, the author has already succeeded in specifying, in the sense that only certain forms of words will correctly express that aspect (though sometimes the author may judge it incorrectly). Thus, in this view, the act of writing or speaking involves a process like a process

of 'growth' or 'development' in time, a passage from something less to more well specified or articulated. In this view, one's words are not fashioned to 'correspond' to one's already existing, well-formed thoughts, one does not put an 'inner' intention or thought accurately into an 'outer' linguistic expression; the process involved is one of a very different kind. Indeed, as Vygotsky (1986), Volosinov (1973), Billig (1987), and Vico (1968) all see it, the very possibility of a person's 'thinking', as such, is constituted in language, as a certain form of "inner speech" (see Chapter 7).

> What sort of reality pertains to the subjective psyche? *The reality of the inner psyche is the same reality as that of the sign.* Outside the material of signs there is no psyche; there are physiological processes, processes in the nervous system, but no subjective psyche as a special existential quality fundamentally distinct from both the physiological processes occurring within the organism and the reality encompassing the organism from outside, to which the psyche reacts and which one way or another it reflects. By its very existential nature, the subjective psyche is to be localized somewhere between the organism and the outside world, on the *borderline* separating these two spheres of reality . . . Psychic experience is the semiotic expression of the contact between the organism and the outside environment. That is why *the inner psyche is not analyzable as a thing but can only be understood and interpreted as a sign.*
>
> (Volosinov, 1973: 26)

It is because of this that one's "mind" is not just a general-purpose organ of general go-anywhere-anytime intelligence, but is 'at home' only in one's own times; one thinks both 'out of' and 'into' a certain cultural 'background'.

The special character of joint action is that it creates a 'developed and developing situation' from within which those who are involved in it can make sense of their activities. For, unintended though the results of joint action may be, as human activity, it nevertheless possesses *intentionality*, that is, it possesses a 'content', it 'points beyond itself', it has an 'intrinsic connectedness' of itself to its context. Or, to put it another way, as Gauld and Shotter (1977: 127) suggest, all mental activity has a specificatory function or aspect, in the sense that it is to do with making (in action) or noticing (in perception) differences. Thus such action 'points to' or 'specifies' a realm of other possible next actions, a 'world of meaning or reference' that seems to make its appearance even as the action occurs, and can thus function as the context from within which the sense of the action is understood and a reply to it formulated – where the reply makes a difference by specifying the already specified context further, and so on, such that the common joint product of the exchange formed is such, that the responsibility of all the parties to its construction is impossible to trace.

On a larger scale, Vico (1968: para. 1108) has described the nature of the genuinely social, individually unintended processes involved as follows:

> It is true that men themselves made this world of nations (and we took this as the first incontestable principle of our Science, since we despaired of finding it

> from philosophers and philologists), but this world has without doubt issued from a mind often as diverse, at times quite contrary, and always superior to the particular ends that men have proposed to themselves; which narrow ends, made means to serve wider ends, it has always employed to preserve the human race upon this earth. Men mean to gratify their bestial lust and abandon their offspring, and they inaugurate the chastity of marriage from which the families arise. The fathers mean to exercise without restraint their paternal power over their clients, and they subject them to the civil powers from which the cities arise . . . That which did all this was mind, for men did it with intelligence; it was not fate, for they did it by choice; not chance, for the results of their so acting are perpetually the same.

The historical processes of human self-transformation involved can neither be understood in terms of the unfolding of a predetermined set of lawful possibilities; nor as a completely random process; nor as a voluntaristic process conducted according to plans of our own. The process involved is just as Marx described it: we do indeed make our own history, but not under conditions of our own choosing. However, we should not think of our unchosen conditions solely in terms of enablements and constraints (Giddens, 1984), but also as providing us with resources and other forms of "psychological tools or instruments" (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) that constitute the make-up of our minds. Indeed, in Vico's view, as we 'grow' and 'develop' historically, resources of an entirely new (but not always morally better) kind can become available to us.

Thus, as he puts it, our historical development can be understood as a process of a *providential* kind: past human activities provide "organized settings" (Bartlett's term: see Chapter 4) which contain the *resources* necessary for the sensible continuation of these past activities; or, to put it another way, previous social activity works to create an "order of possibilities" (Wittgenstein's term: Chapter 4) from which we must choose in deciding upon our next actions – if, that is, they are to be actions 'appropriate to' or 'fitting to' their circumstances. The future cannot be made to occur by the sheer force of one's conviction as to its possibility; one must relate one's actions to what at any one moment is a *real* possibility within it. Thus, if we are to act in such a way, we must not act solely 'out of' our own inner 'scripts', 'plans', or 'ideas', but must be sensitive in some way to the opportunities and barriers, the enablements and constraints, 'afforded' to us by our circumstances, in order to act 'into' them. This grasp, this sensitivity of what is 'afforded' us by our circumstances, is what I mean by a knowing of the third kind.

Why I call it this can be made clear by the following rather long quote from Isaiah Berlin (1976: 107–8). He says of Vico that he:

> virtually invented the concept of the understanding – of what Dilthey and others call '*verstehen*'. Others before him, philologists or historians or jurists, may have had an inkling of it; Vico brings it to light. No one after reading him will suppose that the sense in which we are said to understand a feeling, a gesture, a work of art, a man's character; an entire civilization or a single joke; the sense in which a man can be said to know what it is to be poor, to be jealous, to be a lover, a convert, a traitor, a banker, a revolutionary, an exile, is (to say the least) the same sense as that in which we know that one tree is taller than an other, or that Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf*, or how one text differs from another, or what neutrons are; nor is it like knowing the differential calculus, or how to spell, or play the violin, or get to Mars, or what an imaginary number is, or what prevents us moving faster than light. It is much more like the kind of awareness that is fed and developed by varied experience and activities of how things look in different situations, how the world appears, through concepts and categories, to individuals or groups in different social or emotional conditions. It is this kind of knowledge that is spoken of as plausible or absurd, realistic or idealistic, perceptive or blind; that makes it intelligent to describe the works of historians and social theorists, artists and men of action, not merely as well-informed, or skilful, or lucid, or misled, or ignorant, but also as wise or stupid, interesting or dull, shallow or profound – concepts which cannot be applied to knowledge in either of the other two senses discussed in our time by Gilbert Ryle [1949]: of 'knowing that' and 'knowing how.'

Such a form of knowledge cannot be formulated in terms of facts or theoretical principles ('knowing that'), for it is a form of practical knowledge, relevant only in particular concrete situations. But it is not practical knowledge in the technical sense of a craft or a skill ('knowing how'), for it is knowledge which only has its being in our relations to others. It is a separate, special kind of knowledge, *sui generis*, which is prior to both, and, in being linked to people's social and personal identities, determines the available forms of these other two kinds of knowledge. Indeed, unlike the other two kinds of knowledge, it is knowledge of a *moral* kind, for it depends upon the judgments of *others* as to whether its expression or its use is ethically proper or not[4] – one cannot just have it or express it on one's own, or wholly within one's self. It is the kind of knowledge one has *only from within a social situation*, a group, or an institution, and which thus takes into account (and is accountable to) the *others* in the social situation within which it is known. If it does appear that I can summon up such knowledge wholly from within myself – as a writer, say (Bakhtin, 1984) – then that will only be because, to repeat Volosinov's claim above, "the reality of the inner psyche is the same reality as that of the sign." Thus, it is from within a process of "inner speech," from within an inner conversation, that such knowledge emerges, and is made available to me – not from within my own "mind," but from within the words I use.

A shorthand term for such a form of knowledge, as its content is primarily derived 'from' one's circumstances – for it is do with a proper grasp of what they will 'afford', 'permit' or 'allow' (a terminology suggested by Gibson's (1979) so-called *ecological* approach to perception) – is 'knowing from within', to contrast it both with 'knowing that' and 'knowing how'. It is worth adding here, that in his discussion of these issues, Bernstein (1983) has linked his discussion of them to

Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* and described this kind of knowledge as knowledge of a *practical-moral* kind, and in many of the chapters that follow I have used this term, too.

The Enlightenment tradition

> Enlightening is, Man's quitting the nonage occasioned by himself. Nonage or minority is the inability of making use of one's own understanding without the guidance of another.
>
> (Kant, 1965)

As I mentioned at the outset of this introduction, many of the themes I shall pursue (although not all – see the quote from Kant above[5]) will go against the grain of much in the tradition of modern, social scientific thought in the 'human sciences'. This is because, it seems to me, many of these themes have become irrelevant to our times. How might we identify them? In line with my claim above, that our disciplined ways of knowing are founded or 'rooted' in, and relevant to, rhetorically organized, two-sided, everyday traditions of augumentation, I would now like to add a comment of Billig's (1987: 91):

> to understand the meaning of a sentence or whole discourse in an argumentative context, one should not examine merely the words within that discourse or the images in the speaker's mind at the moment of utterance. One should also consider the positions being criticized, or against which a justification is being mounted. Without knowing these counter-positions, the argumentative meaning will be lost.

Thus, if we want to understand what is argumentatively 'done' by formulating one's claims in certain terms rather than others – thought in terms, say, of mental representations rather than, say, "inner speech," as I am proposing here – we must examine the argumentative context within which such formulations were (or are) fashioned. As many of the themes emphasized in the structure of the current 'human sciences' had their origins in Enlightenment thought and argumentation, it will be useful to trace the origins of those formulations relevant to our purposes here, back to the character of the social and political world within which that argumentation was conducted.

In particular, there are five features of Enlightenment thought that, for my purposes here, it will be useful to highlight: (a) its concern with analysis and (b) mental representations, and (c) with the formulation of such representations as systems; (d) its determination to break away from the authority of traditional, religious systems of thought and to find a new form of authority in ahistorical experience; and (e) its attempts to overcome the idea of original sin, the doctrine used to motivate people's participation in the rituals of organized religion, and its emphasis upon individuals' being able to find all the resources they require to be autonomous, psychologically, within themselves. It is all these features that, it seems to me, must not so much

be replaced as be displaced to a degree, so as to allow their contemporary 'others' (the other side in a two-sided scheme of things) a 'voice' in the current arguments.

In the Middle Ages, the character of intellectual life was securely in control of a priestly class (Manuel, 1965). Only in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did an independent class of popular philosophers begin to attain a degree of ascendancy over it. Unlike today, when most philosophers are professional philosophers, with appointments in State-approved institutions of higher education, those who fashioned Enlightenment thought were a loosely affiliated set of lay persons (seemingly all men), intent upon wresting the control of thought (and talk) from the priests. What united them was the conviction that, by comparison with all previous ages, especially the Middle Ages, theirs was the dawning of a new age, an age of illumination, of enlightenment; their aim was to shine the light of reason into those regions of human life that other ages had kept in the dark. Thus, they ventured to raise a whole lot of new questions, to do with the nature of man,[6] of society, and of the relations between the two. But in raising such questions – about the nature of human nature, about man's 'soul', about the origins and character of religion, about the state and its sources of authority, about the origins of law, and so on – they were treading upon far more dangerous ground than the physical scientists of the previous age – there were still heavy punishments for heresy at the time. Indeed, the questions they raised, and the terms in which they raised them, struck at the very foundations (the legitimacy) of organized religion and organized government.

While England had been a major source of novelty in thought, France was its great continental transmitter: Newton, Locke, and Descartes were among the Enlightenment's important precursors, while the major popularizers and developers of their views were the *philosophes*, among them d'Alembert, Diderot, Rousseau, and Voltaire, the self-pronounced originators of the Enlightenment. The seventeenth century – the Age of Reason – had seen the task of philosophy as the construction of a philosophical or metaphysical "system." Then, truly philosophical knowledge, as Descartes had envisioned it, could be achieved by beginning with clear and distinct (and indubitable) ideas, and proceeding by way of 'geometrical' chains of reasoning, thus to link all of knowledge together – by the method of proof and rigorous inference – into a great system of certainty.

I turn now to the importance of analysis. According to Cassirer (1951: 7), what characterizes the style of Enlightenment philosophizing in the eighteenth century is the "recourse to Newton's 'Rules of Philosophizing' rather than to Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, with the result that philosophy takes an entirely new direction." Although Descartes' conception of reason was retained, his starting point in clear and distinct ideas – in 'hypotheses', as Newton and his followers saw it – was rejected. A science must find its starting point, not in a theoretical abstraction, for such abstractions can be invented and modified as desired, but in observations, in experience. Thus, instead of proceeding by deduction from certain, that is to say, indubitable, axioms, Enlightenment philosophy aims at an *analysis* of experience into its basic facts. Thus, the analytic method involves not merely untutored observation

– that only describes mere appearances – but a special form of analytical observation: the grasping of an 'underlying', hidden reality behind appearances. This involves the splitting of apparently simple events into certain basic elements in such a way that, by reconstructing them according to certain laws or principles, they can be *represented* as events within a rational *system* . . . and thus explained![7] It is this emphasis both upon analysis, and upon its resultant in a systematic representation, that I want to stress, and to note that they still characterize much of our thinking in the 'human sciences' today (Foucault, 1970).

The Enlightenment begins, then, with a loss of faith in the older form of philosophical knowledge, the metaphysical system. It is still concerned, however, with explanations. "But in renouncing, and even in directly opposing, the 'spirit of systems' (*esprit de système*), the philosophy of the Enlightenment by no means gives up the 'systematic spirit' (*esprit systématique*); it aims to further this spirit in another more effective manner" (Cassirer, 1951: vii). Thus, although the turn from the deductive to the analytic method in the eighteenth century marks a shift of focus, from reason to experience, from a starting point in axioms to one in observations, certain continuities remain. The overall urge to be systematic in one's explanatory activities is retained:

> The value of system, the '*esprit systématique*,' is neither underestimated or neglected; but it is sharply distinguished from the love of system for its own sake, the '*esprit de système*.' The whole theory of knowledge strives to confirm this distinction.
>
> (Cassirer, 1951: 8)

For, without a system, without a rational framework within which to interlink contingent facts into a system of logically necessary entailments or dependencies, no soundly based, explanatory knowledge is possible in any field. We can only, seemingly, revert to the contingencies and likelihoods, the persuasions of rhetoric – the influences, once again, of mere opinion. The *systematic*, explanatory nature of the analytic process, is the third feature of Enlightenment thought I want to emphasize.

A fourth feature that is retained, is the methodical doubt, raised by Descartes, of any authority derived from intellectual traditions of the past. Discussing this move in his *Meditations* of 1640, he said that "although the usefulness of such extensive doubt is not apparent at first sight, its greatest benefit lies in freeing us from all our preconceived opinions, and providing the greatest route by which the mind may be led away from the senses" (Descartes, 1986: 9) – the senses which, he thought, could so easily deceive us. In other words, he seeks to establish the rules of properly conducting one's reasoning and of seeking truth in the sciences,[8] by first setting aside the influences of previous traditions of thought. "I realized," as he put it in the 'First Meditation', "that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again from the right foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last" (Descartes, 1986: 12). It is thus that he instituted the idea that, if one is prepared

to undertake the hard analytic work involved, one can throw over the intellectual commitments entailed in one's previous traditional involvements. And one can found a new intellectual system, not in a tradition, not in a way of life or in a way of being in the world, but in a set of theoretical principles, a set of foundational statements.

The fifth feature I want to mention is to do with the source of our own nature as human beings. Although Descartes claimed that the seemingly qualitatively diverse flux of our everyday ways of thinking could be analysed into clear and distinct elementary ideas of an *innate* kind, Locke's 1690 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* suggested different origins. He suggested that all our complex ideas could be seen as having their origins in a complex of simple sensations, in the simple impressions written on the *tabula rasa* of the mind by the 'outside' world. And this was crucial to another aspect of Enlightenment thought. For if the thought of the *philosophes* was going to function as a *Weltanschauung*, a sufficiently comprehensive intellectual system to contest the traditional medieval Catholic as well as the Protestant world-views, it had to meet certain requirements: it not only had to provide a programme of action for social reform, and a utopian vision of the future of mankind on earth, instead of in heaven, it also had to provide a plausible story about man's past to replace the religious story of man's original sin. Locke's views made it possible to argue that the supposed evil of ordinary people was not an innate, natural evil, but an evil that had been generated externally, and had been imposed upon man by society, by his environment.

Till this time, the belief that man, after the Fall (as in Genesis), was naturally corrupt, and that from the time of Adam this corruption had been passed down through every successive generation, had been vital in all traditional Christian theology. This doctrine explained the existence of evil in the world and justified people's suffering. Thus, although Christians might disagree about the precise rituals required for one's salvation in heaven, none disagreed that such ritual observances and obeisances were required here on earth – for there could be no cure for man's naturally occurring evil nature in this life. And since the natural evil in man has to be curbed, to be kept in check by an external force established by God, kingship by divine right was eminently acceptable. Thus, in combating the idea of original sin with the idea of the basic goodness (or at least not evil nature) of "the natural man," the *philosophes* were contesting the very idea that the current historical institutions of State and society, of Church and religion, were the legitimate institutions to minister unto the needs of man.

But if man was not naturally evil, if there was no innate viciousness to be curbed, if man's natural abilities to change the world were greater than had been imagined, then perhaps a more optimistic, brighter prospect for the future of man might be possible. Thus, as Manuel (1965: 6) says, "fortified by this great myth of natural goodness, the age of the Enlightenment came to express a buoyant optimism . . . natural man was the symbol leading the age out of medieval darkness." Indeed, as Kant expresses it above, what was (and still is) at issue is the question of whether (and in what sense) people themselves can be self-determining; must they always (in some sense) be under the yoke of others? It is this latter, emancipatory concern of

the Enlightenment that I do not want to give up. So the question I want to explore is this: by finally giving up, in social affairs, the urge for a unified system of dependencies and the urge for an explanation of everything; by giving up (partially) the 'systematic spirit'; by giving up (partially) the desire for 'ahistorical' decontextualized knowledge; by accepting (partially) people's dependency upon each other; by recognizing that we conduct our academic affairs from within two-sided traditions of argumentation, is it possible to further the spirit of this emancipatory concern in another more effective manner? Is it possible to fashion a new discursive 'space' or 'situation', a new discursive 'activity' or 'movement'[9] (not a framework, nor a system, nor a model – the metaphors chosen here are of outstanding importance), from within which to discuss and debate these concerns?

Social constructionism: a rhetorical-responsive version

As I see it, that movement is already developing (Harré, 1983; Shotter, 1984; Gergen, 1985). Common to all the versions of it known to me is the central assumption that – instead of the study of the inner dynamics of the individual psyche (romanticism and subjectivism), or the already determined characteristics of the external world (modernism and objectivism), the two polarities in terms of which we have thought about ourselves in recent times[10] (Taylor, 1989; Gergen, 1991) – it is the contingent flow of continuous communicative interaction between human beings which becomes the central focus of concern: a self–other dimension of interaction. But until recently, as I have made clear above, this flow of diffuse (feelingful or sensuous[11]) activity has remained in the background as the unordered hurly-burly or bustle of everyday social life. Under the influence of the Enlightenment tendencies or cravings embodied in our social sciences, it has awaited (unsuccessfully) systematic representation in terms of supposed principles either of mind or of world.

What in particular social constructionists want to explore, is how speakers and listeners seem to be able to create and maintain between themselves, in certain of their 'basic' communicative activities, an extensive background context of living and lived (sensuously structured) relations, within which they are sustained as the kind of human beings they are (Shotter, 1984). In other words, social constructionists are concerned with how, without a conscious grasp of the processes involved in doing so, in living out different, particular forms of *self–other relationships*, we unknowingly construct different, particular forms of what we might call *person–world relations*: the special ways in which, as scientists, say, we interact with the different worlds of only theoretically identified entities; the routine ways in which as ordinary persons we function in the different 'realities' we occupy in our everyday social lives; as well as the extraordinary ways in which we act, say, when in 'love' (see Chapter 9). In this sense, a number of person–world dimensions of interaction can be seen as produced *within* the self–other dimension of interaction in a society, as in Figure 1. Where person–world dimension of interaction is, to an extent, orthogonal

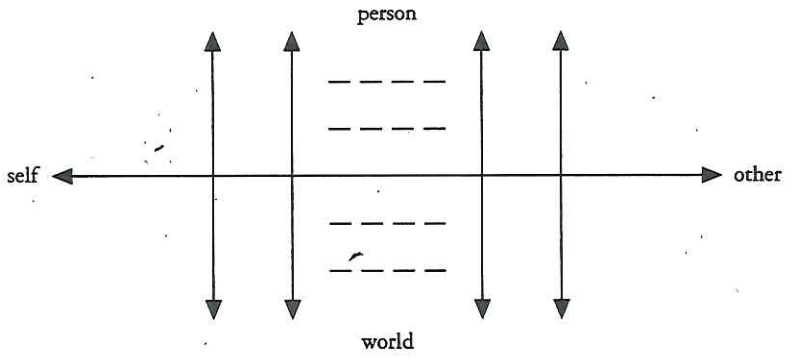

Figure 1 Self–other, and person–world dimensions of interaction.

to the self–other dimension; it is not orthogonal to the extent that it is *not independent* of the interests, etc., of particular persons or groups in that dimension (see Chapter 5).

In this scheme of things, then, the ways of 'being ordinary' available to us in our society, are just as much socio-historical constructions as our ways of being a scientist, or a lover. In other words, not only do we constitute (make) and reconstitute (remake) our own social worlds, but we are also ourselves made and remade by them in the process. It is the dialectical emphasis upon *both* the contingency *and* the creativity of human interaction – on our making of, and being made by, our social realities – that is, I think, common to social constructionism in all its versions. What is distinctive in the rhetorical-responsive version that I want to offer, is (I claim) a way of seeing how, as a result of biases in the self–other dimension of relation, we unknowingly construct biases in our person–world relations.

Turning then to my rhetorical-responsive version of social constructionism, I have chosen to give it a distinctive title because, as I see it, social constructionism currently contains at least two distinct strands. In one of them, what we might call its representational-referential strand, there is a focus upon "already spoken words." This latter strand is influenced primarily by the writings of Saussure (1960), Derrida (1976), Lyotard (1984), and Rorty (1980, 1989), who talk of language as working in terms of already existing, decontexualized systems of conventionalized meanings or usages, characterized either by systems of differences, or in terms of rule-governed language games. This strand is currently in political trouble (Eagleton, 1986, 1989; Lazarus, 1991; Norris, 1990, 1992; Parker, 1992) for its apparent slide into 'absolute' relativism, occasioned by an "uncritical adherence to a theory of language and representation whose extreme anti-realist or sceptical bias in the end gives rise to an outlook of thoroughgoing nihilism" (Norris, 1992: 191). I do have some objections to this strand myself (see Chapter 2), but I am not in agreement with Norris.[12] As might be expected, I feel its difficulties have a different origin: in its commitments still to the Enlightenment themes I have described above.

The strand I want to pursue, as I have already made clear, takes a more two-sided stance towards these commitments, attempting to open up a new discursive space. For, if we want to study the phenomenon of "words in their speaking," to study the 'formative' or 'shaping' function of speech as distinct from its referential function, we must divest ourselves to an extent of certain Enlightenment 'cravings' embodied in our current discourses. In wanting to distinguish my approach from the representational-referential approach I want to incorporate the work of three (already mentioned) people: the turn to rhetoric in the recent work in social psychology by Michael Billig (1987, 1991; Billig *et al.*, 1988), and also the 'dialogical' work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986) and Volosinov (1973),[13] and the responsive theory of understanding they propose (to contrast with the representational-referential account currently hegemonic in linguistic studies) – hence, the characterization of my stance as a 'rhetorical-responsive' one.

A number of points are of immediate relevance to us here, if we are to characterize this version of social constructionism further. Firstly, as I have already mentioned, we must note that all our behaviour, even our own thought about ourselves, is conducted in an ongoing argumentative context of criticism and justification, where every argumentative 'move' is formulated as a response to previous moves. This accords, secondly, with a familiar aspect of rhetoric, to do with its *persuasive* function, its ability to materially affect people's behaviour, to 'move' them to action, or 'affect' their perceptions in some way. Thirdly, we must also note that, in accordance with MacIntyre's views quoted above, what we have in common with each other in our society's traditions is not a set of agreements about meanings, beliefs or values, but a set of intrinsically two-sided 'topics' [Greek *topoi* = 'places'] or dilemmatic themes or 'commonplaces' for use by us as *resources*, from which we can draw the two or more sides of an argument. Finally, we must note another, more unfamiliar aspect of rhetoric, related to those aspects of language to do with 'giving' or 'lending' a *first form* to what otherwise are in fact only vaguely or partially ordered feelings and activities, to do with the study of how common understandings are established *before* one turns to their criticism. It is this fact – that we 'see' just as much 'through' our words as through our eyes (Vygotsky, 1978: 32) – that is, for us here, rhetoric's most important characteristic. For even in the face of the vague, indescribable, open, fluid, and ever changing nature, appropriate forms of talk can work 'to make it appear as if' our everyday lives are well ordered and structured.

I mention these points here, because what makes the version of social constructionism I want to pursue distinctive is its recognition, on the one hand, of the *reality*[14] of the two-sided, commonplace resources mentioned above, but also, on the other, its recognition, among the many other problems to do with representations and their contested nature, that a "means of representation [can] produce something imaginary" (Wittgenstein, 1981: no. 446) – thus, an acceptable characterization of their nature is not that easy to come by.[15] Without attempting to argue the issue further here (but see Chapter 8), in attempting to characterize the nature of the resources our culture makes available, along with both Billig (1991) and Bakhtin (1984), I shall not attempt to impose a *monologic*, theoretical resolution upon the

essentially *dialogical* activity to which they give rise. Not only would that be to attempt to merge people's unique and distinct consciousnesses and points of view all into one, but it would be to ignore the contested nature of these resources. Thus, I shall suggest that – if our task now is to render rationally visible the communicative resources our 'background' makes differentially available,[16] thus to make them more available, practically, to all – then instead of attempting to represent the nature of communicative activity in a unified, systematic theory, we must display its dilemmatic character in other than an analytic way. We must both investigate its nature in use, *and* display it in a usable form.

And we can achieve both these aims *through* the use of the image of the utterance (see Chapter 1 on images as prosthetics and Chapter 4 on Wittgenstein's notion of 'grammatical' investigations). For we can both discover and display the nature of the resources people use, by studying how they 'shape' the everyday communicative activities in which they are involved *in practice*, that is, people 'see' and 'act' through their use of words, just as much as through their use of their eyes and limbs. Their influence is, thus, revealed in the 'grammar' of our perceptions and actions. Hence Wittgenstein's (1953: no. 373) claim that: "Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is." And we can attempt, rhetorically, to display the nature of these resources in the same way: by the use of images and metaphors (see Chapter 6) through which to 'see' (at least an aspect of) their nature. This is not to claim that what one is 'representing' in such an 'image' is an accurate characterization that corresponds to the reality of the resource, it is merely to claim that one has managed to characterize an aspect of what its reality 'allows' or 'permits' – a claim that, even though it may be contested, can, if taken seriously, alter the terms of current debate, and thus alter the structure of current social relations.

The stance taken above – the renunciation of systematic theory in favour of "practical-theory" (Shotter, 1984), or the equipping of an image 'tool-kit' – respects the unfinalizable nature of dialogue, and the fact that dialogic forms of talk occur within a "plurality of unmerged consciousnesses" (Bakhtin, 1984: 9). For although we all may draw upon resources (to an extent) held in common, every voice, every way of speaking, embodies a different evaluative stance, a different way of being or position in the world, with a differential access to such resources. It is this that keeps everyone in permanent dialogue with everyone else, and gives all the processes of interest to us their intrinsic dynamic. And by studying the different ways in which different people, at different times in different contexts, resolve the dilemmas they face *in practice*, we can both characterize the resources available to them in those contexts at those times, and 'plot', so to speak, their political economy, that is, the fact that they are very much more scarce in some regions and moments of our social ecology than in others (Shotter, 1984).

What this book is about: identity and belonging

I mentioned above the overall project, of which the characterization of 'knowing from' is just a component part. Let me now say a few more words about that project.

As I mentioned above, I was originally concerned with what it was to grow up in a society as a self-determining, autonomous person with one's own identity in that society (Shotter, 1975). Then, I thought that to be a person and to qualify for certain rights as a free, autonomous individual, one must also be able to show in one's actions certain social competencies, that is, to fulfil certain duties and to be *accountable* to others in the sense of being able to justify one's actions to them, when challenged, in relation to the 'social reality' of the society of which one is a member (Shotter, 1984). To be someone in this sense is clearly a rhetorical achievement.

But due to the increasing appearance of issues to do with 'otherness', both in fact and theory, it became increasingly clear that, politically, the possession of certain social competencies was still not enough to provide one with a 'sense of belonging', with a sense of 'being at home' in the reality which one's actions help to reproduce. To live within a community which one senses as being one's own, as 'mine' as well as 'yours', as 'ours' rather than 'theirs', a community for which one feels able to be answerable, one must be more than just a routine reproducer of it; one must in a real sense also play a part in its creative reproduction and sustenance as a 'living' tradition of argumentation. And the questions the essays in this book attempt to address are: What is involved in doing this? And what part might academic 'tool or image-makers' play in promoting its greater possibility?

PART I

FROM SYSTEMS TO TRADITIONS OF ARGUMENTATION

· ONE ·

'Getting in touch': The metamethodology of postmodern sciences of mental life

As I have already mentioned in the introduction, there is currently a movement away from *modern* 'sciences' of the social world toward *postmodern* alternatives (Toulmin, 1982; Lyotard, 1984). Here, I want to explore in more detail the character and meaning of the changes involved, especially the factors preventing us from grasping all that we might. Among the many changes entailed is a shift in the character of not only standpoint and investigatory activity, but also its focus and mode of expression: There is a movement, first, from the standpoint of the detached, theory-testing onlooker, to the interested, interpretative, procedure-testing participant-observer; second, from a one-way style of investigation to a two-way interactive mode; third, with a focus upon a wholly new set of research topics to do with what does or can go on between people; and fourth, giving rise to a non-cognitive, non-systematic, rhetorical, critical social constructionist approach to psychology. Here I want both to critique from a postmodernist perspective the methodology of modern science implicit in modern psychology, and to outline the nature of a research programme for a postmodern science of mental life. My critique will have a number of strands to it, but central among them will be, again, an examination of how our commitment to thinking within a system, from within an orderly or coherent mental representation – the urge in reflection to *command a clear view* (Wittgenstein, 1953: no. 122) – in fact *prevents* us from achieving a proper grasp of the pluralistic, non-orderly nature of our circumstances.

Knowledge 'by looking' and 'by being in touch'

Central to the different perspective I want to formulate, is this claim by Rorty (1980: 12): "It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions." Thus, instead of the image (a) of the mind as a (passive) mirror of Nature; (b) of knowledge as accuracy of representation; and thus (c) of the scientist as an external observer, I want to

substitute another set of images: The image (a) of the scientist being as if one of a community of 'blind' persons exploring their surroundings by the use of sticks or through other such instruments; (b) of the knowledge important to them as being to do with them 'knowing their way around' in ways communicable between them; and (c) of the mind as actively 'making sense' of the *relatively invariant* (Bohm, 1965; Gibson, 1979) features they discover in their instrument-assisted explorations of their surroundings – a shift from a way of knowing by 'looking at' to a way of knowing by being 'in contact, or in touch with'. Indeed, I want to argue that it is only in terms of activities like these that the kinds of knowledge we possess and make use of in conducting our everyday affairs are possible.

The change in conducting one's investigations from an onlooker standpoint to a position of instrumentally mediated (or prosthetically aided – see below) involvement is central to a postmodern alternative to the 'human sciences' I want to discuss. But it is not the only change taking place, for this change implies many others. For instance, associated with the adoption of an involved rather than an external, uninvolved *standpoint*, are the different attitudes, values, aims, as well as the guidelines, apparatuses, and devices that can be used in relation to such standpoints; there are also changes in *starting-points* (whether one starts one's investigations when a 'breakdown' occurs, or during the flow of successful activity, in types of *investigative procedure*, in attitudes to language, and especially in modes of *legitimation* (Lyotard, 1984). In detail, there is a shift, first, from a concern with *theories* to *practices*, from theorizing to the provision of practical, instructive *accounts*; second, from an interest in *things* to an interest in *activities* and the *uses* to which we can put the 'mental tools' or 'psychological instruments' (Shotter, 1989a; Vygotsky, 1966) of our own devising; third, away from what goes on in the heads of individuals to an interest in the (largely social) nature of their surroundings, and what these can (or will) 'allow', 'permit' or 'afford'; fourth, from procedures conducted on one's own, to their 'negotiation' with others; fifth, from starting-points in reflection (when the flow of interaction has ceased) to local starting-points embedded in the historical flow of social activity in daily life; sixth, from language being primarily for the representation of reality, to it being primarily for the coordination of diverse social action, with its representational function working *from within* a set of linguistically constituted social relations; seventh, from a reliance upon our experiences as a basis for understanding our world, to a questioning of the social processes of their 'construction' (Gergen, 1985); and eighth, and perhaps most importantly of all, a shift away from investigations *based* in foundations already accepted as authoritative – which thus claim an acceptability for their results ahead of time – towards modes of investigation which allow for error-correction 'on the spot', so to speak (Barnes, 1982; Bernstein, 1983; Rorty, 1980), which find their 'warrants' in locally constituted situations or circumstances.

The shift from third-person observation to second-person 'prosthetics': from metatheory to metamethodology

In the past, in assuming our procedures of inquiry to be secure, and our problems to be located (mainly) in the nature of our subject matter, we have indulged in a great deal of *metatheoretical* and *epistemological* discussion (see, for example, Gergen and Morowski, 1980) – we discussed *theories* because we felt accurate theories were the goal of our investigations. In the approach being canvassed here, our supposed objects of study are of less concern to us than the general nature of our investigatory devices and practices. In other words, instead of metatheory, we become concerned with *metamethodology*: primarily, from our new position as 'blind' investigators, we become interested both in the procedures and devices we use in 'socially constructing' the subject matter of our investigations in concert with our fellow investigators, and in how we establish and maintain a contact with it. For the 'hook-up', so to speak, between such devices and our surroundings, determines the nature of the data we can gather *through* their use. Thus, we must move away from the stance of individual, third-person, external, contemplative observers, away from collecting *fragmented* data from a position socially 'outside' of the activity observed, and bridging the 'gaps' between the fragments by the imaginative invention of theoretical entities, towards a more interpretative approach concerned with making 'sense' of our circumstances. We must move away from the use of *inference* – the *assertion* (on some basis, of course) that essentially unobservable, subjective entities, supposedly 'inside' individuals, none the less exist, towards a concern with modes of *hermeneutical* inquiry. We must move away from theoretical interests towards interests of a much more practical kind, to do with the aids and devices we might possibly use in mediating the different kinds of contact that we might make with our surroundings. But while we move away from such concerns, we do not – as will be made clear below – turn away from them entirely.

To see the consequences of such a shift, let us examine just one major point of difference between knowledge 'by looking' and 'by being in touch'. The devices through which we must conduct our more sensuous investigations, unlike the visual devices providing us with 'pointer readings' which reside 'on the side of' the world, so to speak, reside 'on our side', that is, they function as prostheses, as extensions of our selves.

Prosthetic devices, we might say, reside 'on the side of the agent'; we may come to "dwell in" them (Polanyi, 1958), and learn how to *embody* them as an instrumental means *through* which to achieve our ends. As such, they are 'transparent' – blind people do not feel their sticks vibrating in the palms of their hands, they experience the terrain ahead of them directly as rough, as a result of their stick-assisted 'way' of investigating it in their movement through it; just as the carpenter 'feels' the hardness of the wood, and adjusts the blows of the hammer accordingly as she or he hammers a nail home. Two distinct processes of 'sense making' seem to be at work in such mediated investigations or activities as these: Firstly, following

Bohm (1965: 223–4), we can note that in actively probing or acting upon one's surroundings through an instrument, there is always a response to one's testing and acting, and "it is the relationship of variations in this response to the known variations in the state of the instruments that constitutes the relevant information in what is observed (just as happens directly with the sense organs)," as he says. It is in the relation between the outflow of activity for which one is oneself responsible, and the inflow for which one is not, that one makes available information about 'the other' to oneself – with each sweep of the stick, each blow of the hammer, each test, more information is revealed. Here, we must turn to the second stage of the process: As Polanyi (1958: 55–7) describes it, we attend in such activities *from* an ongoing and changing "subsidiary awareness" of the information(s) provided us by the instruments we use, *to* a "focal awareness" of their organized result – for example, *from* the vibrations occasioned by our movements of a stick *to* the roughness or smoothness of the surfaces over which it is moved; *from* the felt movement of the nail in hammer blows *to* the hardness of the wood; *from* the disparate two-dimensional views given by the movements of our *two* eyes over a visual scene *to* a unified three-dimensional view; and so on.

Consider now, the others around us, prosthetically reaching out to us through similar such devices. For us, they are not prostheses but indicators. In these circumstances, rather than on our side, we might say that these devices reside 'on the side of the world'. Now we must confront them, not as a means, but as having a *meaning* which we must interpret (like a 'text') – as blind people sense a 'spatial array of objects' from out of the cacophony of sounds around them.[1] In this mode, such devices do have a content: they indicate a content given them by those using them, a state of the world. Here, too, we may say that a 'from–to' structure of sense-making is involved, but now we must attend *from* all the fragments of data provided *to* an overall organized resultant. But as it is not now open to us further to investigate the world *by their use*, to fill in any gaps – for indicators are not prostheses – *imaginative completion* is required if we are to achieve coherency. While prostheses, to the extent that we come to embody them, may be accounted as a part of ourselves, our relation to indicators is different; they remain 'other than' or 'outside' of us. Rather than as a means for our use, our relationship to them is a *hermeneutical* one; if we can interpret the information they provide – by placing all its parts suitably within a larger whole – then they present us with a meaning, a state of affairs to which we might need or want to react.

At least, this would be the case if all our dealings with the others around us were of a one-pass nature, so to speak. But they are not, they are dialogic. The detection of 'gaps' in the content of another's speech, instead of motivating their hermeneutical 'filling in', can motivate us, of course, to yet further prosthetically guided investigation of what they might mean.

Up until now, in our vocabulary of knowledge 'by looking', it is the hermeneutical relation to our language that has been most salient to us. That *is* how, when we stop to reflect upon the matter, it seems to us that we *must* make sense of our circumstances. We know that the eye flicks about over the world, seemingly gathering bits

and pieces of data from here and there. Thus, perception *must* work by the organizing of the fragments into an order, and the imaginative filling in of supposedly missing elements which must, originally, have been there, mustn't it? But what occurs in reflection is what occurs in making sense of data from indicators, which, as I said above, involves the imaginative filling in of gaps. Whereas, in one's practical, prosthetic grasp of the meaning of one's circumstances, few such gaps exist; in practice, they are filled in. Thus, what fragmentary data take on in one's reflections upon them, is not so much meaning as *intelligibility*, that is, they become capable of being grasped reflectively and intellectually, by being placed within an order, or system – or, as we shall see in a moment, by being placed within a coherent, narrative form. As Wittgenstein (1953) points out, that order is not in our reality, but has been constructed by drawing upon a syntax, upon a 'grammar' implicit in our language. The *true* meanings of events in the living of our lives cannot be properly understood within the confines of an order; they are only to be found in the not wholly orderly, practical living of our lives.

The prominence of the hermeneutical stance, however, has hidden from us the equally important prosthetic relation: for mostly, we 'see through' the language we use and are unaware of its prosthetic functioning. Only when the flow of activity between ourselves and our interlocutors breaks down, do we find ourselves confronted, so to speak, by just our utterances. To restart the flow, to clarify their meaning, they then seem to require interpretation – hence the apparent primacy of a hermeneutical account of language. But interpretation in that sense is *not* required as long as the flow is maintained. One's words are a transparent means through which one can achieve a sensible contact with those around one. Only if we switch our metaphors, only if we begin to talk of knowledge 'by being in touch' do we begin to raise the kinds of question that make contact with the issues here: to do with the rhetorical 'shaping' and 'moving' functions of language.

With prostheses, we are in an *embodiment* relation to them, we "dwell" in them (Polanyi, 1958); while with indicators, our relationship to them is a *hermeneutical* one. Clearly, words may serve in either capacity, and, as I indicated above and have emphasized in the introduction, it would be wrong to argue *in favour* of either side. As I see it, language possesses what one might call a 'tool/text' ambiguity. Indeed, even in one's own speech, as each utterance is used prosthetically in its *saying* to 'move' another person and thus to reveal in those movements something of their character, so what one has *said* remains on hand, so to speak, as a text, constituting an aspect of the situation between oneself and one's interlocutor. Thus, if we now put the matter in terms of which is better, the knowledge 'by being in touch' metaphor, which has revealed to us a form of knowledge which was otherwise invisible (*sic*) to us, or the knowledge 'by looking' metaphor, which is seemingly necessary to our being able to say anything at all, we are unable to decide between the alternatives. Our ways of knowing seem to be at least two-sided.

'Making' and 'finding'

Indeed, if the claims above are accepted, the process involved in the development of our knowledge is quite unlike any so far discussed in the empirical tradition: it is not induction (for it does not depend upon the discovery of regularities), nor is it inference (for the *unique* and *particular* nature of circumstances cannot be understood by assimilating their details to any already established theoretical categories and premises). As each investigatory 'move' generates a result, a 'fact', a mental 'whole' has to be fashioned to accommodate it. Mentally, we have to 'construct' a context (a world) into which such a result can fit and play its part – where each new fact 'points to' or 'indicates' a 'world' in which they all have their place or function. Prosthetically, in an outflow of activity through one device or another, we can make 'sense' of our contact with the 'otherness' of our surroundings, in terms of the relation between that outflowing activity and the incoming result (Bohm, 1965) – again we might take first the example of the blind person's stick, but next we must imagine the activity of speaking to another and 'moving' them to a response with our words. And the hermeneutical process continues as each new result of each 'movement' is added into the whole constructed so far – where that whole must be progressively transformed and articulated, metamorphosed in fact, in a back-and-forth process, in such a way as to afford all the parts of the whole an undistorted accommodation.

In this view, the utterances of dialogic speech constitute a two-way, psychological 'flow' or 'movement' in which a prosthetic outflow of activity for one speaker constitutes the resulting, inflowing, responsive activity for the other, and the speakers, in their utterances, in the 'movement' between their sense of what they want to achieve in their utterance and their use of particular words, attempt successively to develop suitable expressions. But how is this possible? How can an expression be 'developmentally' formulated in a more or less routine way, word by word, and checked in the course of its 'construction' for its appropriateness? Because, argues Bakhtin (1986: 88):

> Neutral dictionary definitions of the words of a language ensure their common features and guarantee that all speakers of a given language will understand one another, but the use of words in live speech communication is always individual and contextual in nature. Therefore, one can say that any word exists for the speaker in three aspects: as a neutral word of a language, belonging to nobody; as an *other's* word, which belongs to another person and is filled with echoes of the other's utterance; and finally, as *my* word, for, since I am dealing with it in a particular situation, with a particular speech plan, it is already imbued with my expression. In both the latter aspects, the word is expressive, but, we repeat, this expression does not inhere in the word itself. It originates at the point of contact between the word and actual reality, under the conditions of that real situation articulated by the individual utterance. In this case the word appears as an expression of some evaluative position of an individual person . . .

It is in a speaker's particular use of a particular word at a particular point in time – as with the carpenter's particular use of a chisel stroke to slice off a wood sliver at a particular point in a piece of joinery – that the speaker can sense what its use achieves in the construction desired. To repeat Bakhtin's comments above, a word's meaning does not inhere in the word itself, but originates *at the point of contact* between the word used and the 'movements' it achieves in the conditions of its use.

In this prosthetic/hermeneutical account of knowing, then, a process of 'making' or construction is at work. Indeed, even the seeing of objects involves an active psychological process of construction involving socially derived knowledge – doesn't it? Yet currently, we feel that the opposite is the case: that in our 'experience', outer 'objective' events cause inner 'subjective' effects. And we make use of this in our theories about the nature of knowledge and modes of inquiry. We feel some claims to truth are *certain*, not because of the arguments given for them, but because in some way they are *caused* in us or imposed upon us by the outer, objective nature of the world. These truths can be used as 'foundations' upon which to base our further inquiries. Deconstructive analyses such as Rorty's (1980), however, have shown such beliefs to be an illusion. To build knowledge upon foundations constructed upon an analogy between perceiving and knowing, is to see *certainty* as a matter of the world 'outside' our human world imposing something upon us, rather than as something we achieve both in interaction with it and in conversation between ourselves, isn't it?

Well, yes (to a degree) and no (to a degree); and in fact, in my view, both are true – they are both moments in the two-way, interactive mode of investigation I mentioned above. What such a deconstructive analysis means, I think, is that we must finally face up to the lack of any pre-established orders in the world: first, that instead of thinking of our task as that of finding such an order, ready-made, we must consider activities which begin with vague, but not wholly unspecified, 'tendencies' which are then open to or which permit a degree of actual further specification; and second, instead of thinking it possible for special individuals trained in special methods simply to make 'discoveries', any further specifications of states of affairs, if they are to be considered *intelligible and legitimate* to those around us, must be negotiated in a back-and-forth process with them. In other words, we must now think in terms of processes of investigation involving both 'finding' *and* 'making'.

I have tried to include the main aspects of this two-way process in Figure 2. To adapt the useful 'direction of fit' terminology introduced by Searle (1983), what this shows (bottom limb) is that in the world-to-agent direction of fit, as in classical empiricist approaches, we *could say* (that is, the facts will 'afford' us saying) that our ways of talking depend upon the world; they are 'rooted' or 'grounded' in its nature: to that extent our talk is about what we 'find' to be there. But on the other hand (top limb), in line with *hermeneutical* or interpretative views, in the agent-to-world direction of fit, it is equally true to say that what we take the nature of the world to be depends upon our ways of talking about it: to the extent that they 'give' or 'lend' its otherwise open nature a determinate (and legitimate) structure and significance, its significance for us 'is' as we 'make' it to be.

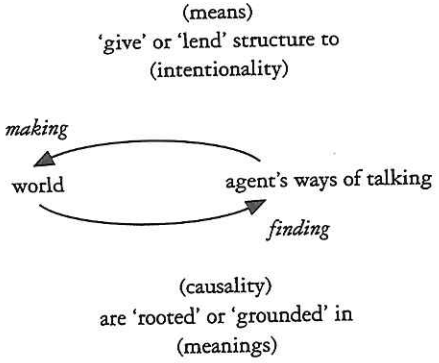

Figure 2 Two-way, interactive mode of investigation.

Thus the fact is, not only *can* one make both of these claims, but one *must* assert that both are true. Indeed, as Derrida (1976) would point out, they owe their distinct existences to their *interdependency*; one claim is an *absent-presence* in 'lending' intelligibility to the other. Thus although one should say only what the facts will permit, the nature of the facts here is such that, although they draw upon different *systematic discourses* for their representation, two equal and opposite truths can, and must, be asserted. And this, of course, is precisely what Billig (1987) is now arguing in relation to the importance of rhetoric and the two-sidedness of human thinking generally.

Currently, however, we find such two-way or two-sided accounts very difficult to accept. For all kinds of reasons, not just in the history of philosophy (see, for example, Cassirer, 1951), but also because of our socialization into the official communicative practices of academic life, we are still committed to an Enlightenment image of knowledge as being both *systematic* and *unitary*, that is, a hierarchical structure of one-way dependencies. What other form could it have? Institutionally, only certain forms of investigation and argumentation can (morally) 'make sense'. We *must* talk in terms of such systems of one-way dependencies, in terms of relations of dominance. We cannot build two-sided truths into an atemporal system. Of the two equal and opposite claims – about which is or should be the *dominant* dependency relation – we feel that it is impossible for *both* to be true. Failing to give any place to time, or to 'moments' in a process in our current ways of thinking, we claim such two-sided truths to be unthinkable.

Grammatical illusions, the *ex post facto* facts fallacy, and entrapment

Why is it so difficult for us to recognize the nature of our own involvement in such temporally constituted, constructive processes? Why are we continually *tempted* to

espouse what are essentially philosophical 'assumptions' (and are initially presented as such) as undeniable 'givens' in our investigations?

As I said above, our major 'prosthetic device' – through which we can gain a grasp of the nature of the 'others' around us – is *language*; and it is the nature of the social conditions required for its proper, communicative usage that is of interest to us in our metamethodological inquiries. But if, instead of thinking of language as being used in this way – to 'make contact' with those around us – we still insist upon thinking of our sentences as *pictures*, where we can *see* in the structure of the sentence the 'things' it represents, then we can mislead ourselves in fundamental ways. Committed to a 'picture' theory of linguistic function, as Wittgenstein (1953: no. 114) says (still using a visual idiom, but now ironically): "One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it." In other words, as he (Wittgenstein) also says elsewhere, a way of speaking is what prevents us from seeing the facts (that is our practices and procedures of usage) without prejudice. And it is overcoming our own misconceptions about our own use of language (and the temptations to misinterpret its nature that it itself offers us) which is one of our main aims in our metamethodological investigations.

But we mislead ourselves in other more complex ways than simply by such 'grammatical illusions'; there are other kinds of ways in which we can 'entrap' ourselves within linguistic worlds of our own making. Stolzenberg (1978: 224) describes such traps as:

> a closed system of attitudes, beliefs, and habits of thought for which one can give an objective demonstration that certain of the beliefs are incorrect and that certain of the attitudes and habits of thought prevent this from being recognized.

This gives rise, Stolzenberg (1978: 224) says, to "methodological errors" which are "those failures to take into account considerations of standpoint that have the effect of *maintaining* the system." These, whatever the nature of the system in question, function to undermine the proper processes of rational argumentation and debate, and to bias its outcome always in favour of the status quo. They are errors *in method* because, of course, the fundamental nature of all scientific methods of investigation *ought* to be such that they are always open to the correction of error; this, however, is not the case when one is 'entrapped'; objections to the system of thought are either rendered unintelligible or assimilated to it in some way. One only has to call to mind one's own attempts to argue with Piagetians, Freudians, Skinnerians, or cognitivists, to understand what Stolzenberg means by such 'closed' systems of thought.

The 'fall' into such a trap comes about as follows:

1 A statement is formulated as a description of a state of affairs which, although we may not realize it at the time, is open to a number of possible interpretations.
2 We are then tempted to accept the statement as true.

3 By its very nature the statement then 'affords' or 'permits' the making of further statements, now of a better-articulated and more *systematic* nature.
4 The initial interpretation (already accepted as true) is now perceived *retrospectively* as owing its now quite definite character to its place 'within' the now well-specified context produced by the later statements – it has been 'given' or 'lent' a determinate character in their terms which it did not, in its original *openness*, actually have.[2]

This is how it comes about that something which was at first merely an *assumption* takes on the appearance of a *definition*; and what had a social *history* of its production appears as an atemporal, ahistorical system of natural necessities.

Fleck (1979) has studied its nature in relation to scientific developments. He comments upon the general nature of the process as follows:

> once a statement is published it constitutes part of the social forces which form concepts and create habits of thought. Together with all other statements it determines 'what cannot be thought of in any other way'. Even if a particular statement is contested, we grow up with its uncertainty which, circulating in society, reinforces its social effect. It becomes a self-evident reality which, in turn, conditions our further acts of cognition. There emerges a closed, harmonious system within which the logical origin of individual elements can no longer be traced.
>
> (Fleck, 1979: 37)

In attempting retrospectively to understand the origins and development (and the current movement) of our thought, we describe their nature within our to an extent now finished and systematic schematisms. But the trouble is, once 'inside' such systems, it is extremely difficult to escape from them.

What Stolzenberg and Fleck show, then, is how a system of thought and expression can work to disconnect itself from its own social and historical origins, and also (seemingly) from its rooting or grounding in the social practices which maintain its appearance of autonomy, and creates the illusion of it being about "a world of things" existing independently of it and external to it. Indeed, the process Stolzenberg describes is entirely general. Ossorio (1981) calls it the "*ex post facto* facts paradox."

The difference between a genuinely scientific approach and an approach within an entrapping system of belief, lies in their respective methodologies: in genuine science, one can *ironicize* one's experience (Pollner, 1975), whereas in a *system* of belief, all acts of observation, judgement, etc., are performed solely from within the particular standpoint of the system itself.

> Specifically, the ironicizing of experience occurs when one experience, tacitly claiming to have comprehended the world objectively, is examined from the point of view of another experience which is honoured as the definitive version of the world intended by the first.
>
> (Pollner, 1975: 412)

The irony resides in the subsequent appreciation that the initial experience no longer possesses the objective nature it was originally felt to have – if, that is, it is possible for the recipient of a supposed ironic claim to interpret it non-systematically, that is, as in fact ironic. But the use of irony is not always successful. Entrapping systems possess a methodology which prevents the ironicizing of experience in Pollner's sense; this means that intended ironic statements are often not seen as such. For, by their very nature, such systems rule out of court forms of criticism, that is argumentative 'moves', not intelligible within the terms decreed by their own methodology – there are many such approaches with such a character within the human and the psychological sciences.

As Feyerabend (1978) suggests, they promote a kind of professionalized incompetence, an incapacity to read accurately, that is, in a way that hermeneutically constructs a whole to accommodate precisely what an author has written; and also, an incapacity to appreciate what is going on in an argument, if what a writer is doing is other than arguing from within a system, that is, using argument in ways other than to justify factual statements. To repeat Stolzenberg's point above, one's entrapment within a system gives rise to a failure "to take into account considerations of standpoint that have the effect of *maintaining* the system." As an example, Feyerabend (1978) discusses how his attempts, in his *Against Method* (Feyerabend, 1975), to be ironic or to use mockery were systematically misinterpreted. As an example of a failure in reading, he discusses the following case (useful to us for how it exemplifies the two-sidedness of things claimed by Billig) in which he made what he thought was a claim of one particular kind, only to have it read as a claim of quite another kind by a critic, K:

> In AM Chapter 2 I write: 'My intention is not to replace one set of general rules by another such set: my intention is, rather, to convince the reader that *all methodologies even the most obvious ones, have their limits*. The best way to show this is to demonstrate the limits and even the irrationality of some rules which she or he is likely to regard as basic. In the case of induction . . . this means demonstrating how well the counter inductive procedure can be supported by argument': counter induction . . . [is] not introduced as [a] new method to *replace* induction or falsification . . . Yet K says that I have a methodology and that 'anything goes' is its 'central thesis' . . .
>
> (Feyerabend, 1978: 185–6)

In other words, his attempt, like Billig's, to show how arguments can reasonably be made out for *both* sides of a case, thus to show up the *limits* of method, that what one must deal with is *beyond* all methodology, is misinterpreted as him proposing yet *another* methodology! It is as if one can no more extract oneself from the 'tradition' within which one is embedded, which one has 'embodied', than one can jump out of one's skin.[3] But why is this? Why is it that, even in 'reflection', we seem unable easily to ironicize our standpoints? What is the source of the 'urges' or 'cravings' we feel to implement one, rather than another, way of knowing?

Narrative entrapments

The answer can be found, I feel, in an examination of the forms of "inner speech," or what Lyotard (1984) calls the *metadiscourses*, currently available to us in our 'thinking' (see Part II). Put this way, as Lyotard sees it, the term *modern* "designates any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse . . . making an explicit appeal to some grand [meta]narrative" (1984: xxiii), while the term *postmodern* signifies an "incredulity toward metanarratives" (1984: xxiv). We have already examined in some detail the nature of the entrapments engendered by theoretical systems; here we must examine those created by narrative structures. I want to suggest that we should be not only incredulous towards grand narratives, but also suspicious of all stories, even little ones, for all are concerned with the 'urge' already mentioned above: the production of intelligibility, that is, the production of an *order*, capable of being grasped reflectively and intellectually (Mink, 1978).

As Kuhn (1962: 4–5) points out, organized, professionalized inquiry can only proceed when it has been decided what the fundamental entities are under investigation; how they interact with each other and with the senses; and what questions may be legitimately asked about them and what techniques employed in seeking solutions. And, just as in a court of law, where a witness's 'story' can, if told appropriately, work to specify quite precisely the evidence required to corroborate or refute it, so in the sciences, narratives function to construct the requirements in terms of which the reality they specify can be checked out. In other words, the narrative form not only 'lends' itself to but also can 'provide a unifying context for' a great variety of language games, and thus legitimate rational inquiry.

This, as Lyotard (1984) has pointed out, is just what in the past has happened: scientific activities have been justified by appeal to one or another "grand narrative," to the great narrative of the emancipation of humanity, or to the theoretical unity of all knowledge (underpinned by a philosophical system). But it is not just in science that narratives are important, they also have a number of important parts to play in everyday life; in particular, they provide the resources in terms of which the relation of knowledge production to the State is routinely formulated (such that it needs no justification, for it is shown to conform to 'who we are', to fit in with a nation's identity). For, a "narrative tradition" is, says Lyotard (1984: 21),

> the tradition of the criteria defining a three-fold competence – "know-how," "knowing-how-to-speak," and "knowing-how-to-hear" – through which the community's relation to itself is played out. What is transmitted through these narratives is the set of pragmatic rules that constitutes the social bond.

Where, as Lyotard (1984: 11) says elsewhere,

> Simplifying to the extreme, it is fair to say that in principle there have been, at least over the last half-century, two basic representational models for society: either society forms a functional whole, or it is divided in two.

Here, then, is our dilemma. We cannot, as Lyotard realizes, intellectually grasp the nature of the relation between our ways of knowing and the State in an orderly manner, in a way that allows explanations and predictions, unless we plump for one, or the other, of these two schemes. It is, as he says, "tempting to avoid the decision altogether by distinguishing two kinds of knowledge . . . [But] I find this solution unacceptable . . . [the] solution itself is still caught up within a type of oppositional thinking that is out of step with the most vital modes of postmodern knowledge" (1984: 14). As he sees it, what characterizes the pluralism of the postmodern condition is not so much oppositions, as a kind of non-oppositional diversity, represented by a lot of little functional wholes. Where these can all be characterized in terms of the concept of "language games," that is, as rule-governed systems. And this, too, as we shall see in the next chapter, is the solution also offered by Rorty (1989) and Bauman (1987). I want to say little more about it here, except to make three remarks. The first is that, as Wittgenstein points out (see Chapter 4), the choice Lyotard makes is a 'theoretical' choice, motivated by an urge *to explain* current circumstances. But in indulging that urge, he runs the risk of failing properly *to describe* what our current circumstances *are*.

Secondly, the theoretical choice he makes is *his* choice, not necessarily ours. In choosing ahead of time in favour of *orderly* systems, he precludes, once again, the possibility of these issues being debated in disorderly, more public forms of argumentation. Finally, he finds the two-sided, descriptive solution unacceptable, because, in interpreting our current circumstances only from within the either-or logic of systematic thinking, he finds it leads to the 'unbridgeable' divisions of "oppositional thinking that is out of step with the most vital forms of postmodern knowledge." The both-and logic of dialogue, of conversation as distinct from rule-governed discourse, however, as we shall see (Chapter 7), is to do precisely with the bridging of such gaps.

A research programme for a postmodern science of mind

In the light of all these concerns, how might we now proceed in a postmodern science of mental life? On the one hand, the switch from a detached, theoretical, individualistic standpoint to a practical, socially involved (interactionist and constructionist) stance for the conduct of socio-psychological inquiries opens up a whole new set of two-sided topics for investigation and questions about them. It suggests not only new forms of professional disciplinary inquiry and the means for validating their results, but also a new vocabulary for new conversations and debates about the nature of our ways of knowing, and their place within our everyday social lives. On the other hand, as I mentioned above, to participate in a conversation is not necessarily to participate in a disciplinary discourse, for, as Rorty (1980) points out, saying things is not always saying how things are. Often, conversational speech is simply responsive, not representational; in not "expressing a view about a subject" (1980: 371), a speaker can be expressing an evaluation, an attitude, an expression of how one is placed in relation to the point of view being expressed by another speaker.

In what follows, I shall not pursue this issue further. It is one thing to outline the context and the nature of disciplined inquiries within a postmodern scheme of things, and quite another to outline the character of the activity appropriate to their criticism (it will be there in abundance in subsequent chapters). In turning to the traditional psychological topics of investigation, although we may be suspicious of such 'origins', we must now see them all as structured or informed (if not in a grand narrative) at least by one or another *local* narrative: where, to repeat Lyotard's claim above, such narratives supply the set of pragmatic rules that constitute the social bond, and thus provide a framework for showing the relevance of the knowledge 'discovered' by such disciplines to our *social identities*, that is, its relevance to how we are 'placed' in relation to those around us. For clearly, a form of knowledge relevant to those at the centre of things, is seen by those at the margins as not only quite irrelevant, but also often as completely unintelligible. Postmodern 'scientific' knowledge thus requires contextualization: those to whom it is addressed require a grasp of 'where it is coming from'. It must be relevant to how people are placed in their world. For our *position*, our *situation*, has to do with the rights and duties, the privileges and obligations, the invitations and barriers to practical action 'afforded' us by our surroundings. Thus, in the context of practical, postmodern, daily social life, all our traditional topics of research in psychology must be seen in this new, contextualized, narrative light. Where the new narrative context legitimating our studies (formulated in one or another local versions) is the 'story' I have so far provided above, of our ways of knowing as being of a two-sided, rhetorically-responsive, socially constructed kind. In this light:

1 *Thinking* becomes, not a matter of computational processes, but *argumentative*: the image of thinking provided by information-processing and rule-following models "curiously demeans the nature of thought itself, for it describes processes which are principally thoughtless . . . Rules do not exist only to be followed: they also have to be created, interpreted and challenged" (Billig, 1986: 11; 1987). The whole new *rhetoric of inquiry* movement is explicitly a postmodernist enterprise (McCloskey, 1983; Nelson and Megill, 1986).
2 Talk of *motives* becomes talk of reasons for action, that is, justifications offered to others (and perhaps to oneself) in rendering one's actions reasonable or appropriate in their context of occurrence (Mills, 1940; Peters, 1958; Edwards and Potter, 1992) – while the study of practical action in a context becomes a *prospective* enterprise (see below).
3 Studies of *emotion,* too, become more concerned with 'movements' in one's position in relation to those around one: they can be viewed as "transitory social roles" (Averill, 1980), and accounted for in terms of one's (moral) relations to others (Harré, 1986e).
4 Studies of *memory* cease to be about the nature of 'storage' and 'retrieval' (of a present record of past events) and become (as Bartlett, 1932, originally formulated the problem) studies of collective remembering (Middleton and Edwards, 1990), or of socially constructed memories (Bransford *et al.*, 1977; Meacham, 1977), and indeed, of socially constructed amnesias also (Jacoby, 1975); remembering in a social group clearly raises matters of authority, and the right to formulate what is to count as the group's memory, as well as what should be taken as the relevant materials for the formulation.
5 *Learning* ceases to be the sole process for the gaining of knowledge; and knowledge ceases to be solely an epistemological matter: it becomes an ontological one also. For only those who are already constituted as *socially* competent within a particular setting can go out and gather 'information' about the nature of that setting in a wholly individualistic way; but they cannot gain their social competence in that setting in the same way. That involves a different kind of 'learning' altogether; it involves 'instruction' by another person, an interactive process – indeed, it involves acquiring the knowledge of how to collaborate effectively in institutions of learning (Shotter, 1984; Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1991).
6 To be instructed in how "to be" in different particular settings is to be instructed in the accepted ways (procedures) of making sense of the "affordances" (to use a Gibsonian term) available to one in that setting. *Perception* thus takes on a non-cognitive, ontological aspect; and studies of perception become concerned with (a) what there is available to be perceived in one's surroundings; (b) the strategies or procedures required to 'pick up' the information available; and (c) the nature of the social conditions required for their development – much of this work is now being pursued by those taking an 'ecological' approach to perception (Gibson, 1979).
7 Finally, *language* is no longer seen as serving solely a representative function, but as also being *formative*; that is, rather than being of use merely to refer to circumstances within a situation, it functions to formulate the situations in which we are involved *as* situations, *as* states of affairs, to formulate them as common 'places' in terms of which we can relate ourselves to one another, to 'lend' them a form which they 'afford' or 'permit' but which they would not, in themselves, otherwise have (Harris, 1981; Mills, 1940; Wittgenstein, 1953). Indeed, rather than our mental processes, our 'thoughts' being the source of our talk, what our 'thoughts' *are* is also constituted or formulated in our talk (Edwards and Potter, 1992).

These reorientations in attitude towards the major topics of psychological investigation outlined above are merely general; rather than settling their nature, they all become, in Gallie's (1962: 169) terms, "essentially contested" concepts, that is, concepts "the proper use of which involves endless disputes about their proper usage on the part of their users." But what is clear is that their effective investigation will not be a matter of 'proving a theory true' but of exploring the scope and limits of a *practical procedure* informed by an image or paradigm (the intersubjective 'feelings' against which the adequacy of a theory's formulation is judged) shared among the members of a research community (McGuire, 1973; Smedslund, 1980). The empirical content of a science can then be judged, not in terms of its possession of true theories, but in terms of the number of interpretative standpoints which have won

a place within it (Toulmin, 1982), that is, the degree of systematic (or disciplined) pluralism it affords.

In such circumstances, the "essentially contested" nature of concepts becomes the norm. This does not mean that such concepts are therefore unusable; it simply means that their usage becomes itself a research topic – the science must possess the resources to ironicize its own claims. It also means that the very hurly-burly of social life, as an ecology of interdependent, local, *heterogeneous*, regions and moments of self-reproducing orderliness, suspended in a more chaotic (but 'nutrient') medium, requires study (Prigogine and Stengers, 1984) – not now as if from a position on another planet, but from within the finitude of our own situation, from how we find ourselves historically placed, our current 'placement' being itself a contested topic of research.

Concluding comments

What is utterly strange to us at the moment – because, whenever we attempt to engage in rational discussion of its nature, we mystify ourselves by routinely adopting a decontextualized, theoretical stance – is our ordinary world of everyday social life. A postmodernist approach to its understanding requires us, first and foremost, to abandon the "grand narrative" of a theoretical unity of knowledge, and to be content with more local and practical aims. This means abandoning one of the deepest assumptions (and hopes) of Enlightenment thought: that what is 'really' available for perception 'out there' is an orderly and systematic world (potentially) the same for all of us – such that, if we really persist in our investigations and arguments we will ultimately secure universal agreement about its nature. But we also should note that although no such unity as yet exists, and experts continue to argue as to what might lead to its discovery, everyday social life still continues in spite of its disorderliness. Our failure to understand how this is possible is an important failure: we continue to treat what is probably a unity of *heterogeneity* (that is, a system of differences) as if it is a unity of *homogeneity* (a system of similarities).

In other words, our failure stems not just from the atomistic individualism implicit in modernism – which has it that people can be treated for the purposes of science as the indistinguishable atoms of physics – but also from us committing what Bhaskar (1989) calls "the epistemic fallacy": our reformulation of (ontological) questions of *being* in terms of our *knowledge* of being. Although I disagree with Bhaskar about the precise character of the ontological dimension he proposes (Shotter, 1990a; 1992), and about the separation of ontological from epistemological questions,[4] I am in total agreement with him about the necessity for social theorists to concern themselves with ontological matters. Indeed, my arguments above have mostly been 'conditions of possibility' arguments in the ontological sphere, that is to say (metaphorical) accounts of what something must *be* like for it to be able to produce what we already know of and take to be a real part of our existence. This also, I might add, is what gives a social constructionist approach a *critical* dimension,[5] for the formulation of ontological forms of talk not derived from prior epistemological

forms provides us with a means for confronting claims to knowledge with the question: 'Could it be otherwise?' Thus, as Bhaskar (1989: 23–24) points out about his own *transcendental realism*:

> It entails the acceptance of (i) the principle of *epistemic relativity*, which states that all beliefs are socially produced, so that all knowledge is transient, and neither truth-values nor criteria of rationality exist outside historical time. But it entails the rejection of (ii) the doctrine of *judgemental* [or moral] *relativity*, which maintains that all beliefs are equally valid, in the sense that there can be no rational grounds for preferring one to another.

And I also would like to make the same claim, except to add that the rational grounds of which Bhaskar speaks cannot be grasped by the forms of explanatory social science he envisages. As I see it, justifying one's claims to knowledge comes to an end, not by their being linked to supposedly scientifically proved propositions, but by their 'placement' within a way of being and acting, a tradition of argumentation, or, in Wittgenstein's (1953) terms, particular *forms of life*, and good reasons being offered for them from within that tradition. In other words, a complex relation between people's identities and their 'hook-up' to their surroundings is involved (Chapter 4; Shotter, 1990b), a relation which a postmodern psychology must explore.

Without exploring it any further here, we can still draw the following conclusions. Although the postmodern *self* may be something of a mosaic, no self is completely an island. In postmodern everyday life, as well as in postmodern science, one occupies a multiplicity of standpoints, each within at least a local community; and within such communities there are standards, ways of judging, to which one must conform if one is be accounted a member. This does not mean, however, that it is only the standards within one's own 'clan' which count. For along with one's own ways of judging, one can ask: 'Could they be otherwise?', 'What other ways of judging might be possible?' And it would be intellectually irresponsible (as well as being rude, unjust, illegal, libelous, partisan, discriminatory, etc.) to ignore those who judge their lives in other ways, and not to treat their claims seriously too. As Toulmin (1982) points out, from the postmodern standpoint questions of *justice* take an equal place in the forum of scientific judgement with those of *truth*. Indeed, we may find that on different occasions, for different purposes, we have *good reasons* for switching from one standpoint to another, for taking up a position within a different community of inquiry. But none (of our reasons) will have the absolute 'knockdown' certainty we crave, because there are no universally accepted systems of knowledge to which to appeal. So, although we can find reasons for preferring some ways of life to others, no single way of life is obviously best – and that is, perhaps, just as well!

· TWO ·

Power on the margins: A new place for intellectuals to be

> Living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focussed our attention upon the centre as well on the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and centre. Our survival depended upon an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and centre and an ongoing private acknowledgment that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole.
>
> (Hooks, 1984: ix)

In the view of knowledge discussed so far, it is difficult to separate our idea of what knowledge is from our talk about it. As I have already suggested, the focus of our studies has shifted. We no longer want to locate an already determined, *real* world beyond the social and historical, and to attempt to discover this world in the depths of either people's organic or psychic nature, or, perhaps, in abstract principles or systems. Then, it was the task of language accurately to represent the reality of these (hidden) worlds. But now, many take seriously Foucault's (1972: 49) claim that our task "consists of not – of no longer – treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak."

In other words, when we talk about such entities as 'society', 'social relations', 'history', 'the individual', 'the self', 'persons', 'language', 'communication' – as well as 'ideology' – we can no longer assume that we all know perfectly well what the 'it' is that is represented by the concept of the entity we are talking about. It is not just that these concepts are "essentially contested" concepts and involve "endless disputes about their proper use on the part of their users," as Gallie (1962: 123) claims. It is that the entities they are supposed to represent are not 'already there' in existence in a wholly determinate form, prior to our talk 'about' them. Thus the

disputes involved are deeper than just with matters of the proper use of language, for they are not about what already exists. They are, so some of us claim, to do with attempting to make new forms of human being *possible* – for "to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life" (Wittgenstein, 1953: no. 19). Thus, in the social constructionist approach I want to explore, new ways of talking do not always merely redescribe (Rorty, 1989) what already exists. In revealing new possibilities for human beings and in instituting new forms of human relationship, they can involve genuine political struggles to do with bringing new forms of social life into existence.

Given such a claim, the subversion of older, systematic, objective realist ways of talking by social constructionist versions, does not just involve the substitution of one 'view' of things by another. The fact that we now seem to lack secure, agreed, principled foundations upon which to base our claims about already existing circumstances is an indication of a change in our practical-social ways of doing things. In fact, what I want to claim in this chapter is that, in one of its versions, the shift can be seen not only as a change in the general 'shape' of our society, but in particular as a change in the position, role and skills of professional academics. Thus, in attempting to say something about these changes, my concern in this chapter is to try to rethink the nature of social life, not in terms of how it appears to us academics from within the orderly 'disciplines' we occupy in our more professional moments – as consisting in either a system or a plurality of systems – but to explore instead what it might look like from a position located more in the zones, the boundaries, the margins, the everyday public spaces, between the more systematic institutions we occupy in those, for us, extraordinary, that is to say, rationally invisible,[1] moments, the moments when we exist as ordinary people. We need to imagine what it might be like to live, not only in a genuinely pluralistic world, only fragmentarily known and only partially shared, but also in a differentiated world, in which its marginal regions are of very different character to its central ones.

If we are to do this, we must rethink not only the nature of our social lives but also the nature of language and thought as possessing, within these (for us) extraordinary regions and moments, a non-systematic, formative or creative character – for it must (as we shall see) have the ability to 'bridge' what are otherwise not obviously connected aspects of people's lives. And this will be to privilege the role of rhetoric in these marginal regions over that of logic. Furthermore, we must rethink the workings of ideology and power in the same way, that is, as not exerted by individual agents in the control of cause and effect processes at the centre, but as formative, to do with the shaping – in communication with genuinely different other people – of a collective, sharable form of life, so that all come to live in a 'world' of their own making. Indeed, to repeat a theme which I shall reiterate throughout this chapter, it is precisely at these moments of indeterminacy, undecidability and ambivalence, in which different people meet each other in the socially constructive encounters in everyday life, that political struggles are their most intense, and where ideology can be detected at work.

Ideology critique: versions of realism and social constructionism

Turning to the question of ideology critique in these present circumstances, we can note that in recent times, the concept of ideology has been in trouble (Eagleton, 1991; Billig, 1991; Simons and Billig, in press). The 'realist' framework, within which discussion of 'already existing' social conditions was theorized and criticized, has seemingly been undermined. "Realism as trust in language is no longer readily available" (Baumgarten, 1982: 117). Indeed, as one aspect of its current problematic nature, Eagleton lists sixteen distinct and often mutually incompatible definitions of ideology. Clearly, it *is* the case that we no longer know what the 'it' is that we are talking about when we try to talk about ideology.

This, at least to those of us on the left who worry about such things as social justice and feel that it is one of the tasks of intellectuals to understand the nature and conditions of human emancipation, is cause for concern. For politically, the point in discussing the functioning of a supposed *ideology* (or ideologies) within a society – as distinct, say, from the overall character of its social life (its ethos) – was to focus upon the question of why, in the struggles and contests that still arise in people's different attempts to express themselves within that society in peaceful, rational ways, it is almost always the case that certain groups of people seem (unfairly?) to prevail over others. Ideology critique has been concerned, then, to study just those aspects of human knowledge and communication which seem to prevent human emancipation rather than to promote it, which seem to establish social injustices rather than alleviate them. Thus politically, the concept of ideology functioned as an intellectual instrument in terms of which to criticize a society's functioning from within. Is there any way in which we can recover it? Eagleton (1991: 221) concludes that "the rationalist view of ideologies as conscious, well-articulated systems of belief is clearly inadequate." We must now explore the idea that ideological issues are fought out in the actual, practical circumstances of communicative activities and practices in everyday life. As Eagleton (1991: 223) puts it, ideology becomes "a matter of 'discourse' rather than 'language' – of certain concrete discursive effects, rather than of signification as such. It represents the points where power impacts upon certain utterances and inscribes itself tacitly within them."

To an extent in line with Eagleton's suggestions above, the stance I shall argue for in this chapter is a social constructionist one – in which all the topics of interest to us are located in the communicative processes between people – but it is a stance in which realist and social constructionist claims (although always contestable) are not in fact incompatible: for claims about the social constructions people *could* produce remain purely theoretical or idealist unless also accompanied by some kind of claims about the actual or real possibilities (and resources required) for such constructions to be available to them in their circumstances. It is just that claims about the possibilities and resources in fact available to them must, like claims about the constructions they might produce, also be warranted in some way from within

the contingent flow of continuous communicative interaction between the human beings involved. We might call the kind of realism involved a non-systematic, situated realism.[2]

This focus upon the actual 'formative' or 'form-giving' moment in speech communication, as distinct from that which takes a retrospective view of linguistic systems of meaning as its central concern, is, as I see it, an issue that separates different strands in the social constructionist movement. Very roughly, this strand can be characterized in terms of its focus upon "words in their speaking," while other strands focus upon the characteristics of "already spoken words." This latter strand – which later, I shall claim, is still in thrall of the "systematic spirit" of the Enlightenment (Cassirer, 1951) – is influenced primarily by the writings of Derrida and Rorty, and emphasizes already existing, decontextualized systems of conventionalized meanings or usages; while the first – in its dialogical, not its monological, individualistic, romanticist form – is primarily influenced by Wittgenstein (1953), Vygotsky (1987), Bakhtin (1986) and Billig (1987), and emphasizes the unique, social, relational (and intrapersonal) functions of situated language use. And it is from within this dialogical strand of the movement that I want to attempt my recovery of the concept of ideology. For if it is only at the actual point of contact between people, in the course of a communicative exchange between them, that the asymmetries in power between them become apparent, that their differential access to resources is exhibited, then there is no prior, external, Archimedean point from which critique can be conducted. Critics must also locate themselves at points, positions, places and moments such as these.

Hence the point of this chapter's title: for it is by definition those on or in the margins of social life, not in the centre of things, who lack power. Indeed, it is in the very nature of the phenomenology of power that those at the centre who have it experience its workings the least. In their world, opportunities open themselves up before them; to have power is to find no resistance to the realization of one's desires. The kind of power of interest to us is not power at the centre, but that at work *between* centre and margins. It is those without power who find at every turn resistances to the realization of their desires. Indeed, they find that it is precisely in the 'formative' or 'form-giving' function of speech they lack the power to participate. They find that certain ways of talking, with their associated forms of life, are already in operation such that, whatever their own experience, whatever their particular projects, they must be formulated, that is, given intelligible and legitimate form, within a certain "vocabulary of motives" (Mills, 1940) not of their own making. They must be seen as intelligibly related to what are taken, by certain other groups, to be ultimates in justificatory conversation. Indeed, at any one moment, these 'basic' ways of talking can seem to be so pervasive (and persuasive) that although there are clearly many other important spheres of human activity, they *dominate* a people's form of life in the following (judgemental) sense: given that the people in a society mutually judge and correct each other as to the 'fittingness' of their actions to what they take *their* (whose?) ultimate reality to be – if, that is, they are to sustain those intralinguistic realities in existence by continually remaking them in their

everyday, social activities – it is in this 'basic' kind of talk that all such ultimate judging and evaluating, that is to say, final accounting, must take place. Indeed, as Wittgenstein (1953: no. 242) insists, "if language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments."

But whose intralinguistic reality is it?

But the question is, within *whose* intralinguistic realities is all this judging and correcting to be done? This, I think, is the ideological question. For ideological influences are at work in our very attempts to formulate our utterances and to have them taken seriously by our listeners. Indeed, as Bakhtin (1986: 121–2) says:

> A word (or in general any sign) is interindividual. Everything that is said, expressed, is located outside the 'soul' of the speaker and does not belong only to him. The word cannot be assigned to a single speaker. The author (speaker) has his own inalienable right to the word, but the listener has his rights, and those whose voices are heard in the word before the author comes upon it also have their rights (after all, there are no words that belong to no one).

Indeed, as he adds later (1986: 293–4), a word becomes 'one's own':

> only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own.

And, as he could also have added, it also only becomes one's own when the others addressed by one's utterances are prepared to listen to them, and to hear in them one's own accent or tone, one's own semantic and expressive intentions, the 'shaping' one gives to it that is expressive of one's own very being. It is here, at these moments, when meanings are being 'negotiated' (to put it mildly) or 'fought over' (to put it more strongly), that politics is at its most acute.

If we turn now to the other social constructionist strand exemplified in some of Rorty's (1982, 1989) writings, we can perhaps now see why it is not without a certain degree of irritation and disdain that they are viewed on the left. For in dropping the idea of language as being 'about' the world, as working to represent one or another reality, Rorty seems to have retained the Enlightenment idea of the philosopher's task: that as professionals it is still their task, monologically and in detached contemplation, to find, and to specify ahead of time, the nature of that deeper, ahistorical order of things behind appearances; only now, he claims, that order of things is to be found solely within certain, systematic ways of talking, within particular "final vocabularies," or "language games." Yet, for the 'players'

within them, the 'users' of them, these 'games' seemingly have no point of contact with a reality that is 'other than' the speaker's own; they speak seemingly into a resistance-free context. Indeed, as he says (Rorty, 1989: 21), "it is essential to my view that we have no prelinguistic consciousness to which language needs to be adequate, no deep sense of how things are which it is the duty of philosophers to spell out in language." Thus much of what those on the left still care about he finds ridiculous or ludicrous; as for the notion of ideology, as Eagleton (1991: ix) points out, Rorty finds it "useless" (Rorty, 1989: 59). As he sees it, "a liberal society is one which is content to call 'true' (or 'right' or 'just') whatever . . . view wins in free and open encounter" (67), where such encounters can only concern, not the description of any 'actual' or real' states of affairs, but only the different "final vocabularies" people use in justifying their beliefs, actions and lives to themselves and to the 'us' who share in the vocabulary.

So, although one may have felt at first attracted by the idea that discourses constitute the objects of which they speak, one's feelings of frustration and disempowerment increase when one discovers what seems to be entailed in Rorty's version of this claim. For, continuing with what he has to say about the nature of our "final vocabularies," we find that those who hold them (Rorty calls them "liberal ironists") both have "radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary [they] currently use," and realize that "argument phrased in [their] current vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts" (Rorty, 1989: 73). Indeed, the only recourse available to us (if we are to follow the form of life his language game entails) seems to be that of trying to make our own views look good and our opponent's look bad, where the liberal ironist realizes "that anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed" (1989: 73). But why is this? Why is it a mere matter of what 'looks' good or bad, or, merely a matter of what can be 'talked of' as such? Why cannot people argue for their vocabularies, for a way of talking which, they claim, reveals actual aspects of their social lives hidden by other forms of talk? For Rorty (as for Lyotard), all these questions are answered by the crucial fact that, at least as he sees it, rational argumentation *can only occur within a language game*. For, he claims:

> When the notion of 'description of the world' is moved from the level of criterion-governed sentences within language games to language games as wholes, games which we do not choose between by reference to criteria, the idea that the world decides which descriptions are true can no longer be given a clear sense.
>
> (Rorty, 1989: 5)

This is the critical move. For, as he sees it, not all words are meaningful: "To have a meaning is to have a place in a language game. Metaphors, by definition do not" (1989: 18). Thus, for him, only certain words are meaningful. This is not because (as I have been assuming) utterances can have, in their very nature, a formative or shaping function – the ability to give form to feeling, to formulate linguistically our embodied 'sense' of our circumstances – but because their use is rule-governed.

Their meaning is a consequence of the existence of a prior order; a system of already established, conventionalized meanings.

It is this move, however, that I think is a major mistake: While the idea that "the world decides which descriptions are true" may not make much sense *theoretically* outside the context of a language game, it is not difficult to find a sense for it within everyday, *practical* contexts of communication. Indeed, when we move from a retrospective, decontextualized concern with the characteristics of "already spoken words," and turn to a focus upon the use of "words in their speaking" in a context, then I think it is perfectly possible to see how, in particular practical communicative contexts, it is always possible to argue that one's claims, if not exactly corresponding in every detail to 'the world', are such that they are at least permitted by, or afforded by, the circumstances prevailing in those contexts. In other words, our talk *can* bear in an important sense upon what is *real* in those contexts, even though others may contest what we say, and claim that other (and better!) accounts capture what our circumstances afford more adequately. But more than that – and here is another crucial feature missed in Rorty's individualistic, privatized approach to language and speech communication – the words we use to describe our circumstances, whether contested for their adequacy or not, may not just be chosen as we please. For again, as Bakhtin (1981: 293) puts it,

> there are no 'neutral' words and forms – words and forms that can belong to 'no one'; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life . . . The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent . . .

But given the 'tastes' of past usages, language does not pass

> freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others. So, although the meaning of a word is to do with how it is used by the speaker at the point of contact between the speaker and those to whom the speaker's words are addressed, a word is not available to be used in just way the speaker pleases. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process
>
> (Bakhtin, 1981: 294)

Thus if we ask now, "Whose intralinguistic reality must we participate in constructing, if we are to read Rorty's text with understanding?" we find that it is not just Rorty's own idiosyncratic form of life, but that of a philosopher in the *analytic tradition* that is at issue.

The "systematic spirit"

To see this, we can ask a series of questions. Why is it that, in Rorty's version of social constructionism (and in the other 'postmodern' versions similar to it), issues such as those raised by Bakhtin are missed? How is it that we find in Rorty no discussion of the role of dialogue, or of the dialogic nature of language;[3] no provision for non-systematic argumentation, for the rhetorical discussion of the possible; no discussion of practical reasoning in practical contexts or of how initial misunderstandings might be resolved in social negotiations? How is that, although Rorty (1989: 189) says that what "I have been urging in this book is that we try *not* to want something that stands beyond history and institutions," the actual making of history or the emergence of genuine novelty seems to be impossible in his world – for, as Rorty (1989: 99) sees it, there are "only little mortal things to be rearranged before being redescribed"? Why is it, given that he sees the function of conversation as being to do with the generation of new descriptions and "as the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood" (Rorty, 1980: 389), that he provides no *rational* role for free and open conversation, claiming that all of rational importance can only go on within a language game, within *systematic*, rule-governed ways of talking? Thus, strong poets (and Madison Avenue executives?) rather than ordinary people are the heroes of his society, because in the "free and open encounters" he envisions, the poet's ways of talking is the talk that will win out.

And finally, why is it that, although he distinguishes between "normal," mainstream, systematic philosophers who are constructive and offer arguments, and "abnormal," peripheral, edifying philosophers who are reactive and offer satires, parodies and aphorisms (Rorty, 1980: 369) – and clearly casts himself in the latter role – he has such trouble with understanding "otherness," with trying "to extend our sense of 'we' to people whom we have previously thought of as 'they'" (Rorty, 1989: 192)? How does he envision his relation to 'us', his readers? Where does Rorty position himself in our current social scheme of things such that he still feels confident that he will be listened to and taken seriously, even though he casts himself into such a (supposedly) marginal role? What actually is Rorty's image of a living society?

As he himself says (as I noted earlier), "it is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions" (Rorty, 1980: 12), thus, if we are to take him at his word, to answer the questions above, we must seek the 'pictures' and 'metaphors' that currently shape his philosophical activities. But where should we locate our search? Clearly in the history of his philosophical "final vocabulary".[4] What is the overall 'formative or organizational tendency' present in Rorty's writing that gives it its style? The tensions and tendencies in Rorty's ways of working, in his practices (rather than his claims), can be explained, I think, by the still unreconstructed Enlightenment concerns – the 'taste' of past usages – his vocabulary incorporates. In other words, he embodies precisely the "systematic spirit," along with the analytic method, described by Cassirer (1951) as characterizing the style of Enlightenment philosophizing.

Without a *framework* within which to interlink contingent facts into a system, no rational explanations of phenomena are possible. It is this that Rorty is unwilling to embrace; he is still writing within the tradition of analytic philosophy.[5] He is still concerned to explain phenomena by analysing them into their supposed observable elements and their orderly interconnections; to produce a monological, ahistorical, detached, theoretical account that can specify ahead of time the order of things behind appearances – thus, to show us, by comparison with supposedly more 'traditional' accounts, the extent of our current mistakes and misunderstandings. He claims, for instance, that morality lacks any 'deep' justifications to be found in anything we share in common form with all other human beings. For him, morality just is a social practice, and "'moral principles' . . . are reminders of, abbreviations for, such practices, not justifications for such practices . . . [such that] the core meaning of 'immoral action' is the sort of thing *we* don't do" (Rorty, 1989: 58–9). For him, there is either *one*, correct, theoretically well-grounded answer (which many are now agreed is unlikely) to a problem, or no answers at all can be well grounded. While he could treat "moral principles," not as reminders, but as versions, as people's formulations of certain, deeply sensed aspects of the human condition,[6] which others see as justified but contest on the grounds of their partiality, their favouring of some aspects of our condition over others.

But, as he sees it, if no theoretically well-grounded justification for the existence of such a sense of solidarity with others can be given, then, it is justified to claim its non-existence – because we do not have to listen to arguments not "from the interior of a language game" (Rorty, 1989: 47). This, I submit, is for Rorty a move to the centre, a move away from the marginal position of the edifying, responsive, ironic philosopher he first presented himself as being, towards once again the position of the professional analytic philosopher at the centre of things, whose task it is make things orderly, in order to explain, predict and control. Thus, consistent with analyses in terms of unitary, systematic language games, we find he assumes for societies also single, all-encompassing, monolithic forms of social life, forms of solidarity. Where "our sense of solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is expressed are thought of as 'one of us', where 'us' means something smaller and more local than the human race" (Rorty, 1989: 191), where in fact, "'us' is, typically, contrastive in the sense that it contrasts with a 'they' which is also made up of human beings – the wrong sort of human beings" (1989: 190). This systematic, monolithic form of life, I submit, is not exactly the 'picture' of our societies we require if we are to make sense of what we now take our pluralistic, postmodern, social conditions to be. While Rorty may help us negatively, in understanding what might *prevent* us from properly grasping how language constitutes reality, it is difficult to see what *positively* he provides by way of alternative pictures and metaphors that might break the hold of the systematic spirit upon us. Where might we search for an alternative vision?

Before I suggest my own answer to this question, let me examine Bauman's (1987) answer, for not only has Bauman been particularly concerned with the relation between postmodernity and the function of the intellectual in society, but his

views parallel those of many others, such as Habermas (1979, 1984). In his view, the movement from a state of modernity to postmodernity *is* a movement from a view of the world as a systematic totality to a pluralism of different orders or systems. "The typical post-modern view of the world is, in principle, one of an unlimited number of models of order, each one generated by a relatively autonomous set of practices" (Bauman, 1987: 4). Hence, like Rorty, he believes: "There are no criteria for evaluating local practices which are situated outside traditions, outside 'localities'. Systems of knowledge may only be evaluated from 'inside' their respective traditions." Thus, as he sees it, although intellectuals have now lost their modernist position as legitimators and legislators at the centre of an "orderly totality," they can become interpreters or translators, working from 'inside' various different systems of knowledge. "What remains for intellectuals to do, is to interpret such meanings [as those in which a community is founded] for the benefit of those who are not of the community which stands behind the meanings; to mediate the communication between 'finite provinces' or 'communities of meaning'," he says (Bauman, 1987: 197). Thus, in this view, intellectuals still occupy a position inside *a system* of one kind or another (albeit not now one very big one), and they are still concerned to play the same language game that Enlightenment, analytical intellectuals have always tried to play, one way or another, that is to say, monologically, to represent its supposed hidden or underlying character accurately within a unified system of knowledge from the standpoint of a detached observer. In other words, Bauman's view of the intellectual as an interpreter clearly does not involve any very radical change in our roles or skills. We speak from a privileged centre still, albeit now one of a more local kind. What goes on in the boundary zones, in the margins between the orderly and systematic centres, is, it seems, none of our concern.

The move to the boundaries: joint action

However, if we no longer feel motivated to participate in these 'analytic' language games – producing representations of supposed realities behind appearances – and would like to engage more directly in current social and political issues (being prepared to risk having what we say challenged by ordinary people), how might we now best proceed? How might we move away from the Olympian, disembodied, individualistic and personally uninvolved standpoints which, as academics, we have adopted in the past, standpoints from which we have attempted to provide *theoretical* accounts of (assumed already) *systematic* states of affairs? Instead, what might it be like to be embodied, interested persons, living in the as yet unsystematized boundary zones between systematic centres, i.e., on the margins, facing the task of specifying or articulating the character of life within those zones practically and dialogically, in interaction with the others around one? What might help to break the hold of the Enlightenment, monologic, analytic, systematic spirit upon us?

As a first step, it is at this point, in attempting to characterize the nature of those dialogical moments, in which a second person spontaneously responds to the actions or utterances of a first, that I would like to return to the concept of "joint action"

I introduced earlier (Shotter, 1980). For us as intellectuals, this is a very unusual kind of activity; as intellectuals, we pay most attention to those kinds of activity in which we suppose people to know what they are doing, in which they put their plans into action, or theories into practice. But as I mentioned earlier, there are many other human activities in which – though we may be loath to admit it – we all remain deeply ignorant as to what we are doing, or why we are doing it. Not because the 'ideas' or whatever, supposedly in us somewhere informing our actions, are too deeply buried to bring out into the light of day, but because the formative influences shaping our conduct are not wholly there, in our individual heads, to be brought out. Activity of this kind occurs in response to what others have already done, and we act just as much 'into' the opportunities and invitations, or 'against' the barriers and restrictions they offer or afford us, as 'out of' any plans or desires of our own. Thus, the stony looks, the nods of agreement, the failures of interest, the asking of questions, these all go towards what it is one feels one can, or cannot, do or say in such situations. This is joint action; it is a spontaneous, unselfconscious, unknowing (although not unknowledgeable) kind of activity.

Let me repeat in slightly more detail its ideal characteristics. As I see it, joint action has two major features: It gives rise to *unintended consequences*, that is, outcomes which are not intended either by *you* or by *me*, but which in fact are *our* outcomes. However, as they cannot be traced back to the intentions of any particular individuals, it seems *as if* they have a 'given', 'natural', or 'externally caused' nature, that is to say, they are *real* in the sense of being independent of the desires or opinions of any of the particular individuals involved.[7] Also, as human activity, joint action still has *intentionality*, that is, at any one moment in time the outcomes people construct between them have a meaning or significance, such that only certain further activities will 'fit' and be appropriate, while others will be sensed as unfitting or inappropriate and will be ignored or even sanctioned. In other words, as an outcome of the joint action between them, people find themselves 'in' a seemingly 'given' situation, an 'organized' situation that has a 'horizon' to it and is 'open' to their actions. Indeed, its 'organization' is such that the constraints (and enablements) it makes available influence, that is to say, 'invite' or 'inhibit', people's next possible actions. Above, I called these features ideal for the following reason: in the terminology I introduced earlier, if it is in the self–other dimension of joint action that our person–world dimension of interaction is produced, then only if everyone is able freely to participate in that dimension can the person–world dimension of interaction be truly independent of any particular individuals or groups – otherwise, so to speak, these two dimensions are not orthogonal to each other, the person–world dimension is 'infected' by events in the self–world dimension.

It is in this way that joint activity is important, much more important, I would argue, than those actions in which people supposedly *do* know what they are doing. For it is in joint action with others, in sustaining between ourselves what Giddens (1979) and Bhaskar (1989)[8] have called the "unacknowledged (background) conditions" of our social actions, that we continually participate in recreating those circumstances in which, mysteriously, some feel much more at home than others.

They do so because the circumstances in question are *theirs* – they have had more to do with their construction than others. We may attempt, in such situations, to appropriate their words for our use, but (as Bakhtin noted) it is not that easy; a 'taste' of their past usage remains.

We, as academics, do of course often occupy such boundary or marginal regions – but not if we can help it. It is not in those situations that we experience ourselves as having our ordinary, everyday, professional being. Those situations are occupied by the 'others' who lack what 'we' prize: the rational 'power' (at least to seek) to put our own considered plans into action, or tested theories into practice. In those places, power is exerted on the spot, not so much thoughtlessly as planlessly, in a 'streetwise' way we academics do not understand, and disdain. Given a preference, those places are not among our preferred places to be; we prefer places upon the podia, in front of 'civilized' and 'disciplined' audiences. We, in our language games, still want to sustain our own forms of life.

And this is why – when claiming to represent the needs of others unlike ourselves, the poor and the oppressed, those 'outside' our language games – we fail to grasp why our representations of them are demeaning. We exclude their voices; they can play no part in those fleeting, extraordinary moments of indeterminacy, undecidability and ambivalence, when we determine each other's being, each other's identities. Our conversational politics excludes them. By our insistence upon the use of certain 'professional' textual practices, we do not allow ourselves to be influenced in our identities, as the academic professionals we are. Thus, no matter how benevolent we may be towards those we study – no matter how concerned with 'their' liberation, with 'their' betterment, with preventing 'their' victimization, etc. – the fact is that 'we' do not make sense of 'their' lives in 'their' terms. 'We' do not even make sense of 'their' lives 'with them', thus to arrive at a version upon a common 'ground' between 'us', that is, not 'us' here, but 'us' here and 'them' there as a new 'us'. While what they say is treated as 'data', they themselves are not treated seriously as being able to speak the truth about their own lives; their claims do not pass 'our' institutional tests. Thus, although our social scientific 'findings', as a relation of dependency between cause and effect, may institute a relation of domination between us and them, they are silenced. They must live lives described publicly in ways which makes sense only to those who 'rule' them. And we, in our preferred mode of being, sustain this dominant (and dominating) mode of talk, for we as yet still do not possess a way of representing these extraordinary, marginal moments institutionally.

Common-sense traditions of argumentation: practical-moral action

Here, it will be useful to take another step in the attempt to break the hold of the systematic spirit upon us: reminding ourselves of Billig's work mentioned earlier, we can move from the idea of knowledge as only existing in already interconnected, unitary 'bodies' of knowledge, to the idea of it existing as a fragmentary, and even

two-sided, *resource* – from which systematic bodies of knowledge might be fashioned – but which does not itself already exist as a system. Billig (1987: 41) traces the origins of the idea that such processes are two-sided, back to the origins of Rhetoric and to the claim of Diogenes Laertius that Protagoras was "the first person who asserted that in every question there were two sides to the argument exactly opposite to one another." Although there are many important implications of this view of knowledge – as fragmentary resource rather than as a system – the aspect of importance to us here is the opportunity it affords us of conceiving of the tradition, or culture, or ideology associated with a form of life as consisting in something other than a system. Instead, we can think of it as consisting in a continuously developing, historically and socially extended argument, embodying a continual, unresolvable movement between the two-sided nature of the 'topics' or 'commonplaces' constituting it, topics which not only give it both its *style* and *content*, but also its life!

And it is here that we can make contact with our worries about the state of ideology critique, and whether we can overcome them. In their important book (building on Billig, 1987), Billig *et al.* (1988) point out that the meaning of ideology itself is nothing if not itself two-sided, or (as they say) "dilemmatic": they distinguish between the idea of a "lived" and an "intellectual ideology." While an intellectual ideology is a *system* of political, religious, or philosophical thinking, that is very much a product of professionals, and exerts its influence in the making of self-consciously monitored decisions in institutional settings. Whether defined in terms of 'styles' or 'habits of thought', as *Weltanschauungen* or as 'distortions of reality', the effect is the achievement of a 'closure' of an otherwise 'open' (and thus to an extent chaotic) state of affairs in favour of a particular *social order* – often in the interests of a particular group or class. A "lived ideology" is quite different. It exhibits what Billig *et al.* claim are the *contrary or dilemmatic themes* that are intrinsically present in the "common sense" of a society. Indeed, as they see it, "the very existence of these opposing images, words, evaluations, maxims and so on is crucial, in that they permit the possibility not just of social dilemmas but of social thinking itself" (Billig *et al.*, 1988: 17) – they do not just constrain thought, but both motivate and enable it. They are "the *seeds*, not *flowers* of arguments," they say (1988: 16), quoting Bacon (1858: 492).

Thus, as a resource to draw upon, a lived ideology exerts its influence at just at those dilemmatic moments of uncertainty in everyday human affairs when routine forms of coordination break down, and people must construct between themselves a new way of going on. It will determine the positions they put forward and the justifications they offer. Thus, while an intellectual ideology may provide the basis for the resolution of a final dilemma, a lived ideology provides all the resources for the struggle producing it.

It is this emphasis upon the dilemmatic or two-sided nature of everyday human thought and action that is the crucial step, and which marks off the stance of Billig *et al.* from that of both Rorty and Lyotard, and of many other postmodern thinkers in fact. Indeed, in this respect it is interesting to note what Perelman and

Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969: 85) have remarked about this two-sidedness of human thought: They suggest that it is "possible to characterize societies not only by the particular values they prize most but by the intensity with which they adhere to one or the other of a pair of antithetical *loci* [values]." If this is so, then the pair of antithetical loci which, it seems to me, identifies the Western world as Western, and has done so for some long time, is, first, the dream of a harmonious, unified *system* of knowledge (fashioned for us by experts) which, one day, will give us a single true answer to each and every one of our questions, with all the answers being compatible with each other, thus to form a framework to help dissolve for us ahead of time all the struggles we now face between our conflicting values; versus, second, the fear that certain of our values simply may not be compatible, that there is no methodical, systematic way, discoverable by experts, to resolve our conflicts, and that chaos and disorder will therefore reign. This latter fear is the systematic spirit's "other." And it is this – not just, as Rorty claims, the radical contingencies of our being – that we must face: the dilemma raised by the realization that *both* sides of such loci play a part in our social lives together. In other words, what we as academics must face is the fact that our claims to disciplined and systematic forms of expert knowledge, have their basis in more public, everyday, common-sense forms of knowledge and argumentation – forms of knowledge that we as social scientific experts often claim, without a proper realization of their nature and function, must be replaced with better and more 'scientific' forms.[9]

Instead of attempting to replace common sense, however, how might we rethink both its nature as a resource (rather than as a system), and also the nature of language, as making use of it in the boundary regions of our interest? Well, in this respect, it will be interesting to turn to what a number of people have already said about its general nature. Common-sense knowledge in general is "unformulated and only vaguely conceived," says Heider (1958: 2). "It embraces the most heterogeneous kinds of knowledge in a very incoherent and confused state" (Schutz, 1964: 72); it is "immethodical" (Geertz, 1983: 90), that is, it caters both to the inconsistencies and diversity of life, it is "shamelessly and unapologetically ad hoc. It comes in epigrams, proverbs, *obiter dicta*, jokes, anecdotes, *contes morals* – a clatter of gnomic utterances – not in formalized doctrines, axiomatized theories, or architectonic dogmas," Geertz adds. Yet strangely, as he goes on to say, for all its disorder, such knowledge has "accessibleness" as another of its major qualities. Or, as Barthes (1983: 214) says, "the power of the Image-repertoire is immediate: I do not look for the image, it comes to me, all of a sudden," on occasion after occasion, called out by (internal or external) accidents of one's situation, at "the whim of trivial, aleatory circumstances" (Barthes, 1983: 33). In short, common sense already seems to function perfectly well, if not as an overall theory in terms of which to explain everything ahead of time, then as a practical resource in terms of which to make sense of things on the spot, as required in a way appropriate to one's own circumstances. So, although it is clearly a cultural formation, it in no sense consists in a system or a framework; that would seem to preclude its use as a practical resource.

Given the nature of common sense as a practical resource, how should we rethink

language, that is, think of it in non-systematic, non-cognitive, more sensuous terms? Well, what might it be like if we were to reckon as if there had been no books in the world? It is the (for us) extraordinary nature of spoken forms of communication that we must understand. We must grasp the nature of a form of communication which does not consist in an orderly, sequential occurrence of events or things, or in a series of component meanings, but merely 'subsists' in the continuous flow of sensuous, 'moving' activity between people. Indeed, one of "the most basic defects of traditional approaches to the study of psychology," says Vygotsky (1987: 50), who has worried about this issue, "has been the isolation of the intellectual from the volitional and affective aspects of consciousness." We must attempt to recover a *sense* of, or quite literally, a *feeling* for, what the activity of speaking must have been like – before as children we learned to replace the sensory aspect of words with images of words – to treat the activity of speaking as "a unity of affective and intellectual processes" (1987: 50).

Here, we make contact with the idea of the prosthetic function of the speaking of words, outlined in the previous chapter. Rather than as already having meanings, we must think of words as a *means*, as 'tools' for use in the making of meanings.[10] Not primarily as a means for the ultimate making of textual or go-anywhere, decontextualized *meanings*, but as primarily for use in communicative transactions, in the here and now, in the making of a *sense*, which works not so much to communicate ideas (out of my head and into yours), but to prompt in us an affective reaction, a 'sense' *through which* others can feel the movement of our minds, *to which* they feel they must respond in some way. Indeed, it is precisely this active, rhetorical-responsive form of understanding – as distinct from the passive, Saussurian referential-representational form – that Bakhtin (1986: 68) suggests we must adopt if we want to understand the function of living utterances in speech communication (rather than the structure of sentences in linguistics).

Conclusions

It is in these terms, I think, that we need to make the ontological gestalt switch required to understand how a lived ideology works. But all the changes discussed above mark a major rupture in current traditions of philosophical thought. Indeed, they are radically shocking and not easy to accept. For, as I have already said, our thought about thought and language – and the fundamental nature of the world, for that matter – is still influenced by images first fashioned during the Enlightenment, images which are currently embodied in the lived ideology in our academic disciplines. Thus currently – although we might intellectually accept that discourses, as practices, systematically form the objects of which they speak – we still *nevertheless* find it extremely difficult in practice to accept that often in our talk we are not talking 'about' anything which actually exists. Nor is it easy to accept that it is no longer appropriate to invent general, abstract entities and processes – such as 'social class', 'social institutions', 'social transformations', 'equilibration', 'reification', 'objectification', etc. – as the mysterious *agents* responsible for the changes taking

place in social life. For it is just this move which works to hide all the actual, socio-political processes of importance – to hide those moments of indeterminacy, undecidability and ambivalence when real politics is at work.

In the same way, we find it difficult to accept the worth of unsystematic, dialogical, rhetorical-responsive thought, the kind of thought that goes on in joint action in ordinary conversation with others. We feel that, if thought is *not* ultimately contained within an already existing, commonly recognized system of some kind, then there can be no shared standards, no shared meanings. It is thought of as a somewhat worthless kind. Indeed, if contradictory claims are tolerated, then, 'anything goes', doesn't it? No, not at all. Instead, what we have in common can be seen not as a set of agreements about meanings, beliefs or values, but as a set of – for us in the situation of our argument – *real* societal resources, that is, two-sided *themes* or *topics*, and a set of 'means', or 'tools', for giving shape to the topics relevant to our momentary circumstances. And, as long as we use them in ways which are intelligible and legitimate to those around us, then 'on the ground of human interaction', so to speak, we are (or ought to be) free to use them as we please in giving form to our lives – their judgements are relevant to our uses. Thus we cannot – by the same token – just use them in *any* way we please. In this sense, such resources can be both enabling *and* constraining, or disabling.

Implicit in the version of social constructionism I have attempted to set out above, then, is a radical reappraisal of the nature of the embodied, common-sense, practical-moral, dialogical knowledge possessed by the members of a society. In this view, new knowledge neither grows out of a special method, nor the special mind of a 'genius', nor "new theoretical monologues" (Billig *et al.*, 1988: 149), but "the voices of ordinary people in conversation" (1988: 162). This is not to say that academic intellectuals cannot play an important role in this process – indeed, if it were not the case, there would be little point in the writing of this book. But note its form: it has been concerned not with supposed accurate representations of actual states of affairs, but with pictures and metaphors, with images – joint action, lived ideology, traditions of argumentation, etc. – which have allowed us (partially and at a cost), to 'see' influences at work that otherwise would have remained rationally invisible to us. But none of these metaphors should be allowed (as currently that of the language game bids fair to do) to become discursively hegemonic. For that, once again, would be to privilege systematic theory, and the theorist's form of life over that of practitioners. Thus, for us as academics, the move from the orderly centre to the disorderly margins marks a new task: that of identifying the real possibilities and resources present in those fleeting, extraordinary, non-professional moments of indeterminacy, undecidability and ambivalence in the boundary zones between the more orderly aspects of our institutional lives, in which we encounter those about whom we care.

> Moving we confront the realities of choice and location. Within complex and ever shifting realms of power relations, do we position ourselves on the side of colonizing relations? Or do we continue to stand in political resistence with the oppressed, ready to offer our ways of seeing and theorizing, of making culture, towards that revolutionary effort which seeks to create space where there is unlimited access to pleasure and power of knowing, where transformation is possible? This choice is crucial. It shapes and determines our response to existing cultural practice and our capacity to envision new, alternative, oppositional aesthetic acts. It informs the way we speak about these issues, the language we choose. Language is also a place of struggle.
>
> (Hooks, 1990: 145).

For, to repeat an earlier theme, a new way of talking institutes a new form of human interrelationship; thus a 'voice' from the margins can formulate the commonplace topics that give our culture its style from a new point of view.

· SEVEN ·

Conversational realities and academic discourses

I want in this chapter to draw an important distinction: that between conversation and academic or disciplinary discourses – a distinction roughly similar to that between playful activity and the playing of games *as if* according to rules (Shotter, 1973b). There will be a number of interesting spinoffs from such an endeavour, most of which will become clear as I proceed, but the central reason why I want to make this distinction I will state now: our search, not just for explanatory theories, but for predictive ones, at least within one of the "grand narratives" (Lyotard, 1984) of the West, has often been for emancipation.[1] And rational frameworks, in being both explanatory and predictive, seemingly allow us to aim at the future, by manipulating the present, on the basis of understanding the past. We have wanted to understand the 'machinery' of emancipation, with the hope that once we had its plan of operation, we could consult it when necessary to choose the right buttons to press or levers to pull, thus to set emancipatory activity upon its right course. Without a rational framework, as an aid to carry around with us, how else might we proceed in our emancipatory endeavours? How otherwise can we understand how to bring about *in the future* what at present we lack?

The answer is, I suggest: by understanding how conversation works. For 'providentially' (as Vico in fact claims), it contains more possibilities for our own future development than we have ever before imagined. But grasping them requires us to grasp them not as static, spatial forms, but in their dynamic, temporal formative 'movements'; not from a position of detached observation, but from a position of involved participation. Thus, if we can *critically describe* the social conditions conducive to emancipation in *this* Wittgensteinian sense, then – although we will not then be able to stand aside to watch it happen, because rather than theoretical knowledge, practical-moral knowledge will be involved – we will *nevertheless* know how to distribute and apportion our own responsibilities better in the processes involved.

A Vygotskian study of the form of 'instruction' involved in enabling, say, a middle-class child to become linguistically autonomous, and that involved in disabling[2] a working-class child so it remains subservient to external authorities, would

(very roughly) consist in *descriptions* of the different instructive words used, in what contexts, and at what times, that is to say, an account of what, socially, brought the difference about. "Is that all that happens?" Wittgenstein (1981: no. 314) spoke of the difficulty here of not seeking further.

> The difficulty is not that of finding the solution but rather that of recognizing as the solution something that looks as if it were only a preliminary to it. 'We have already said everything. – Not anything that follows from this, no, *this* itself is the solution'.
>
> This is connected, I believe, with our wrongly expecting an explanation, whereas the solution of the difficulty is a description, if we give it the right place in our considerations. If we dwell upon it, and do not try to get beyond it.
>
> The difficulty here is: to stop.

A description is 'instructive' *if* – take Wittgenstein's notion of language games as an example – it is given at an appropriate point in a conversation, at a moment of sensed difficulty: through it, prosthetically, one can see 'connections' not previously grasped. A description is also 'instructive' *if* – in one's inner, dialogic speech – one continually 'gives it' to oneself (as handing oneself a tool) as an aid in 'thinking through' many different, problematic circumstances: then it enables one to make comparisons, see differences, arrange the different cases in an order, etc. (see Chapter 4).

'Basic' ways of talking

As I mentioned earlier, Harré (1983: 58) claims that "the primary human reality is persons in conversation." In Harré (1990: 345), he goes on to criticize a certain model of conversation – Argyle's (1990) coordinated interaction model (CIM) – by claiming that

> conversation cannot itself be something to be understood under [such a model] because it *is* itself that model. By that I mean that so far as anyone has ever been able to ascertain, there are only two human realities: physiology and discourse (conversation) – the former an individual phenomenon, the latter collective.

Now I think Harré is trying here to say something similar to what I am claiming above: that conversation cannot itself be something to be understood in terms of a model because it itself provides the 'grounds', or works to create the 'space', in terms of which *all* supposed 'models' in science are in fact seen as such. But he is experiencing a degree of difficulty, he oscillates between conversation and discourse, and one senses something of a strain in logical grammar in claiming conversation itself to be a model. If it is a 'model' of itself, then it lacks precisely those characteristics that make a model useful in science: the possession of a surveyable order making it possible for us to contemplate an overall 'mental picture', or a *mental representation*, of a problematic state of affairs. The trouble is that, in terms of our present cognitive-representational construal of the nature of knowledge, our knowledge of a conversational reality is utterly *strange* to us – even though, remarkably, it is the world of our own everyday life. For if to imagine something is to contemplate it in the sense I outlined above, then it is a world that we cannot even imagine, for it is the primary 'background' of human activity from which mental representations emerge and in which they are grounded.[3] Yet without some kind of shared textual account of *its* nature to carry about with us, how are we to compare the worth of different kinds of human *Umwelten*, and the different forms of human being they might and do make available to us? Without an account of how the lives of different peoples are 'rooted' in different 'backgrounds', we have no way of investigating further the crucial anthropological, political and ethical questions we now face.

To begin to outline how such an account might still be possible, let me begin with some reminders about the relation of language to perception. One is Rorty's (1980: 12) remark that

> it is pictures[4] rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions . . . [And] without the notion of the mind as a mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself.

Another is, as Billig *et al.* (1988) and Volosinov (1973) have pointed out, that a way of talking and communicating 'shapes' not only our ways of looking at the world, but also our ways of thinking, speaking, acting, and evaluating, and in fact provides a whole "living ideology." Indeed, by the time we develop into socially competent adults, it is as if a 'semantic engine or mill' of some very general kind is at work within us somewhere, homogenizing everything we encounter to fit it into a particular world order, into 'our' world. It is, and this my final reminder, as Garfinkel (1967: vii) has put it, our ways of talking and acting come to work, from within themselves, to make "those same activities visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes, that is, 'accountable', as organizations of commonplace everyday activities."

My reasons for beginning with these comments are three. The first, simply, is to emphasize Rorty's and Garfinkel's claims above: that certain 'basic' ways of knowing and talking – our 'embodied' ways – primarily work to create, maintain, reproduce and transform certain modes of social and societal relationships, to 'open up' to us, so to speak, different forms of human being (and by the same token, 'close off' others). In this view, as I have said before, it is *not* the primary function of these forms of talk to *represent* the world. If, in our experience, it seems undeniable that at least some words do in fact stand for things, they only do so, I have argued, *from within* a form of social life already constituted by ways of talking in which these words have been already used in some other, non-representational way – as 'tools' to 'shape' people (Bakhtin, Volosinov, Vygotsky). Thus the entities they represent are known, not for what they are in themselves, but in terms of their 'currency' or

their significance in our different modes of social life, that is, in terms of what it is deemed sensible for us to do with them in the everyday, linguistically structured circumstances of their use. They have their *being*, they have their 'life', only within the form of life we (the whole community) conversationally sustain between ourselves. Hence the difficulty we have in formulating and testing any "theories" of the nature of these 'basic' ways of talking; we do not know properly how to doubt them. That is, we do know how to formulate any intelligible doubts about their nature without relying upon them for the intelligibility of our formulations.

Secondly, in such a view as this it is assumed that the primary function of these ways of talking is to 'give shape' to, to coordinate, and to account for, diverse social action (Mills, 1940). Indeed, at any one moment, these 'basic' ways of talking seem to be so pervasive (and persuasive) that, although there are clearly many other important spheres of human activity, they *dominate* our form of life in the following (judgemental) sense: given that people must mutually judge and correct each other as to the 'fittingness' of their actions to what they take their ultimate reality to be – if, that is, they are to sustain those realities in existence by continually remaking them in their everyday social activities – then, it is in this 'basic' kind of talk that all such ultimate judging and evaluating, that is, final accounting, must take place. Indeed, as we know, and as Wittgenstein (1953: no. 242) insists, "if language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments," and we can now see that without such judgements, the culture would not of itself settle and endure (Vico).

My third reason for mentioning Rorty's and Garfinkel's claims above, is simply to ask the following questions: What must we, and the nature of our 'basic' ways of talking (and knowing), be like, for it to be possible for us to find ourselves limited by the 'pictures' implicit in our ways of talking, and for 'metaphors' to be influential in and upon our philosophical convictions? What is the nature of the urge we feel, as academics, to arrive at a supposed accurate 'picture' of an event or circumstance? How do ordinary people, without the supposed 'disciplines' available to us academics, make what they are talking about "rationally-visible" to themselves? I raise these questions because the answer to them, I feel, is not to be found in any academic discourses, but *doubly* in the nature of everyday conversational realities themselves: in describing how and why such forms of talk are so fundamental to our form of being in the world, and in finding within conversation itself – but not a disciplinary discourse (Foucault, 1972)[5] – the resources required for the description of its own nature (cf. Harré's comment, above, about conversation being its own model).

In discussing the nature of conversational realities and their distinction from (disciplinary) discourses, I want to argue for the importance within them of the third, extraordinary form of non-representational, embodied or sensuous, practical-moral knowledge I have introduced above. Given our current 'basic' ways of talking, however, we cannot easily grasp the nature of such knowledge. Indeed, to the extent that we cannot "command a clear view" (Wittgenstein, 1953: no. 122) of its overall nature, we cannot rationally imagine it. Further, because it cannot be represented (or formed) as an object of knowledge within a normative or disciplined form of

talk, that is, within a discourse, its nature, for us, is *extraordinary*. Yet, even so . . . if not as a "model" of itself (note the terms of Harré's claim above), then at least as a metaphor of itself . . . if not from within a discourse, then at least from within conversation itself (note Harré's equivocation between discourse and conversation) . . . it is still possible, I think, to elucidate its nature. And that is what I want to attempt to do below.

The sensuous, non-cognitive nature of everyday, human conversation: knowing of the third kind

At this point, I want to return to Vygotsky's work to begin to introduce a further problem, to do with the activities at work within the voicing of words, a problem that Vygotsky touched on in a number of ways: the socially *evaluative* attitude embodied in a word in its speaking. In broaching this problem, let me first remark that Vygotsky sought to emulate Marx's method in *Capital*, which is, as he saw it, of focusing upon a single living "cell" of capitalist society, such as the nature of value (a microcosm of the macrocosm), thus to discover within it the whole system (Vygotsky, 1978);[6] he spoke against that method which

> analyzes complex psychological wholes into *elements* . . . It leads us into serious errors by ignoring the unitary nature of the process under study. The living union of sound and meaning that we call the word is broken up into two parts, which are assumed to be held together merely by mechanical associative connections.
>
> (Vygotsky, 1986: 4–5)

Given, as we have now seen, that words as single units only have their life, so to speak, within utterances within speech genres, I now want to point out that although Vygotsky spoke of people using words as 'tools' in organizing the structure of their own activities, he also saw *words* as providing the investigatory unit we need. "What is the unit of verbal thought that is further unanalyzable and yet retains the properties of the whole? We believe that such a unit can be found in the internal aspect of the word, in *word meaning*" (1986: 5).

Here, then, I would like to return to examine further the idea of words as 'tools', to give yet more prominence to the formidable range of formative activities at work within them, in their voicing – for words themselves are a source of ceaselessly unforeseeable originality.[7] Indeed, at the moment of its uttering, a word itself is the site of joint action – and thus formative of a providental space in miniature. "The word is a thing in our consciousness", as Ludwig Feuerbach (1986: 256) put it, "that is absolutely impossible for one person, but that becomes a relation for two. The word is a direct expression of the historical nature of human consciousness." In bridging the 'gaps' between voices, words link 'me' with what is 'other than' me; a word is interindividual and cannot be assigned to a single speaker; 'I' can be 'moved' even in my own speech by the influences in a word of 'others'. Words can thus function for us also as investigatory units. And, we should feel no disquiet now

in focusing on words and not on utterances as aids in our investigations, for why shouldn't we have different tools in our tool-box for different purposes? Our tools themselves do not have to interlock into a system.

The fact that words work in non-cognitive, formative ways to 'shape' our unreflective, embodied or sensuous ways of looking and acting, speaking, feeling and evaluating, has in fact always been one of Vygotsky's main themes. But, held 'captive' by the picture of knowledge as inner representation, there has been a widespread failure to appreciate this – and a tendency to interpret his talk of 'tools' in only an instrumental sense – even to the extent of suggesting Vygotsky himself failed to appreciate the importance of sensuous, embodied knowledge also (Takatori, 1992). This is not so, and in fact cannot be so. In developing from creatures functioning under the control of our surrounding (social) circumstances to functioning under our own control, more is involved than incorporating within ourselves just the instrumental aspect of the words that others first use in controlling, directing, and organizing our behaviour for us. Indeed, even a cursory reading of *Thought and Language* (Thinking and Speech)[8] makes it clear that Vygotsky took seriously Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach – that reality has been incorrectly "conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation* not as *sensuous human activity, practice*" (Marx and Engels, 1970: 121). Indeed, without the sensory, sensuous or affective function of words, to 'move' people to perceive and act in different ways, his whole project falls to the ground.

Thus it comes as no surprise, in attempting at the outset to clarify the nature of the problem as he sees it, to find him saying that "when we approach the problems of the interrelation between thought and language . . . the first question that arises is that of intellect and affect" (Vygotsky, 1986: 10). If they are separated, then, he says, "the door is closed on the issue of the causation and origin of our thoughts", for we are unable to understand "the motive forces that direct thought into this or that channel." Hence, the approach he adopts "shows that every idea contains a transmuted affective attitude toward the bit of reality to which it refers." If we add to this his reminder that "all the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals" (Vygotsky, 1978: 57), then we can claim that the affective attitude which provides the thoughts and ideas of an individual with their dynamic, that is, with their particular motives and valencies[9] linking them to each other and their surroundings in a particular way, is a transmuted version of a social relationship. But of what kind?

Well, quite literally, as we have already seen, of an "instructional" kind; we come to 'instruct' ourselves as others instruct us. But now we must see those instructions as occurring in a real social context of asymmetrical power relations. Thus, although people do do a large number of instrumental things to each other in their talk, they do other things besides. Before focusing upon that, though, let me just offer some reminders of the nature of 'instructive' talk: People 'point things out to us' ("Look at this!"); 'change our perspective' ("Look at it like this"); 'order' our actions ("Look at the model first, then at the puzzle pieces"); 'shape' our actions ("Turn it over, then it will fit"); 'remind' us ("Think what you did last time", "What do you already know that's relevant?"); 'encourage' us ("Try again"); 'restrain' us ("Don't be too hasty"); 'evaluate' for us ("That's not right", "Don't do that, that's greedy"); 'set our goals' ("Try to put these pieces together to match that [pointing at a model]"); 'count' ("How many will it take?"); make 'measurements' ("Will that fit properly?", "Just compare"); make us 'check' our descriptions ("Is that right?", "Who else says so?", "What's the reason for your belief?"). But in doing so, they voice their 'instructions' in a certain tone, a tone that is 'shaped', among other things, by how they see themselves 'placed' in relation to whom they are addressing. And on occasions, of course, they utter explicit evaluations: 'they distance themselves from us' ("Don't do that, it's crazy"); or 'they affirm they share our world' ("Wow, that's great"); and so on. And so on, for no doubt a countless number of instrumental functions, and, if not countless, at least a large number of possible social relations.

With these issues in mind, it is perhaps worth returning for a moment to what Vygotsky had to say about there always being a 'hidden' thought in our speech, its 'subtext'. Here we might mention two examples: The first (1986: 250–3), is from a play in which Stanislavsky listed characters' supposed hidden motives in saying what they said. In the play, Chatsky comes across Sophya unexpectedly, and she, in her confusion, seems insufficiently pleased to see him. She tries to tell him that she is *always* pleased to see him. He answers: "Well, let's suppose it's so. Thrice blessed who believes. Believing warms the heart." As Vygotsky remarks, Stanislavsky interprets this as "Let us stop this talk." He himself suggests, among a number of other possibilities, that it could equally well mean "I do not believe you. You say it to comfort me." Whatever . . . it is a question of the intonation adopted by the actor that will determine whether it suggests distancing offence, accepting resignation, or a hopeful suggestion of a new start, and the play's director must choose according to how it fits in with the rest of the proceedings. Another example (pp. 241–2) is one Volosinov (1973: 103–4) also reports: Dostoevsky relates a conversation between six drunks that consists entirely of one unprintable word said six times in succession by each of them. In its context, the conversation is perfectly intelligible. Without quoting the whole piece, it will be enough to note that the sequence goes as follows: the first is a disdainful denial of a previous point; the second, a doubted veracity of previous denial; then, indignation at the first's denial; then, indigence at the third drunk butting in; an exclamation by the fifth, 'I've got it'; while the sixth pours cold water on the fifth. Volosinov's interest in this example is that it illustrates that the word in this instance was only a vehicle for intonation, and that in this case the intonation was wholly indicative of the different evaluative positions between the speakers in the dialogue, and of the struggles between them. Vygotsky's interest here, is to show how in our inner dialogues with ourselves, "inner speech," our sense of what we are 'talking' about may be as vague and ill formed as the words in this drunken conversation, and yet still serve their purpose perfectly well.

Now, with our more academic concerns in mind, let us turn our attention towards *concepts* to see how they are transformed when viewed with this scheme of things. Again, words are the *means* Vygotsky has in mind when he says that

> the main question about the process of concept formation – or, about any goal-directed activity – is the question of the means by which the operation is accomplished . . . To explain the higher forms of human behavior, we must uncover the means by which man learns to organize and direct his behavior. (Vygotsky, 1986: 102)

And "our experimental study proved that it was the functional use of the word, or any other sign, as means of focussing one's attention, selecting distinctive features and analyzing and synthesizing them, that plays a central role in concept formation" (1986: 106). "Learning to direct one's own mental processes with the aid of words or signs is an integral part of the process of concept formation" (1986: 108). But now we must think of *who*, at each dialogical point in the organization of our 'thinking', when we must issue the next reminder, the next directive to pay attention, etc., is voicing the relevant word? And, perhaps, what dissident voices might be heard also! In other words – Vygotsky's words – what one has learned to do in thinking conceptually is not to compare the configuration of a supposed mental representation with the configuration of a state of affairs in reality, but something else much more complicated. One has grasped how to organize and assemble in a socially intelligible way, a way which makes sense to *certain of the others* around one, bits and pieces of information dispersed in space and time in accordance with 'instructions' they provided, and which now a supposed 'concept' provides.

On this view, rather than a self-contained, simply subjective activity within an individual – dealing with merely inner, cognitive 'pictures' which may, or may not, be accurate representations of an outer reality – thinking conceptually becomes a special social practice. And furthermore, it becomes a practice in which speech, thought and feeling are, at least at first and for the most part, interlinked with their surrounding circumstances in "a dynamic system of meaning" (Vygotsky, 1986: 10–11). As examples of how, in our inner speech, our use of a single word can evoke the sense of a whole world, Vygotsky mentions the titles of books and plays: *Don Quixote*, *Hamlet*, *Anna Karenina*. "Another excellent example is Gogol's *Dead Souls*. Originally the title referred to dead serfs whose names had not yet been removed from the official list and who could still be bought and sold as if alive" (1986: 247). Only gradually, and probably as a result of the effects of becoming literate – in which, "in learning to write, the child must disengage himself from the sensory aspect of speech and replace words by images[10] of words" (Vygotsky, 1986: 181) – can we learn to think like academics, and develop modes of formal, decontexualized rationality, that is, to think in wholly representational[11] terms. Influenced by this 'picture' of what thinking is, the traditional methods fail "to take into account the perception and the mental elaboration of the sensory material that gave birth to the concept. The sensory material and the word are both indispensable parts of concept formation" (Vygotsky, 1986: 96–7).

How might we do better? What kind of account of speech communication would afford us the possibility of linking words to sense, of elucidating the relation of form to feeling?

It is at this point that I would like again to turn to Bakhtin's work on the dialogical nature of speech communication, for, as we have already seen, it opens up to study those *dialogical or interactive moments* when there is a 'gap' between two (or more) speaking subjects. And, no matter how *systematic* the speech of each may be while speaking,[12] when one has finished speaking and the other can respond, the bridging of that 'gap' is an opportunity for an utterly unique, unrepeatable response, one that is 'crafted' or 'tailored' to fit the unique circumstances of its utterance.[13] Indeed, it is "on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects" (Bakhtin, 1986: 106) that the *life* – whatever it is that is 'living' in the communicative act – is manifested. Thus we can appreciate, as Volosinov (1973: 68) says, that:

> What the speaker values is not that aspect of the form which is invariably identical in all instances of its usage, despite the nature of those instances, but that aspect of the linguistic form because of which it can figure in the given, concrete context, because of which it becomes a sign adequate to the conditions of the given, concrete situation. We can express it this way: *what is important for the speaker about the linguistic form is not that it is a stable and always self-equivalent signal, but that it is an always changeable and adaptable sign.*

In fact, given both Volosinov's and Bakhtin's view – that even within the speech, or the writing, of a single individual, many 'voices' can be at work, such 'gaps' can be found, prompting us to affectively react to what they have to say[14] – the turn to a 'dialogical' account of the speech process opens it up to a whole new realm of discursive activities to study. It is in the creative work of semiotically linking ourselves, meaningfully, both to each other and to our surroundings, that we also socially construct our identities – where, as we saw earlier, this is done by our being embedded in a common sense of our own making.

Conversation, *sensus communis*, and metaphor

In turning to the origins of such a sense, a culture's *sensus communis*, I discussed earlier Vico's account of the social processes involved. Here, because I want to refer to aspects of it in what follows, I want briefly to recapitulate it. The processes involved, he claims, are based not upon anything pre-established either in people or in their surroundings, but on socially shared *identities of feeling* they themselves create in the flow of activity between them. These he calls "sensory topics," – "topics" (Gr. *topos* = 'place') because they give rise to "commonplaces," that is, to shared moments in a flow of social activity which afford common reference, and "sensory" because they are moments in which shared feelings for already shared circumstances are created. The paradigm situation I mentioned earlier, involved everyone running to take shelter from thunder, where people's responsive reaction to it was fear, expressed in the character of their bodily activities. This gave a shared *sense* to an *already shared* circumstance. It is at this point that Vico introduced the idea of an "imaginative universal:" in the case of thunder, this is Jove, the image of a giant being, speaking giant words, but one can easily imagine other such shared circumstances in which

shared feeling, expressed in the same responsive, bodily reactions might occur – the birth of a child, the death of a group member, and so on. And later, perhaps, on to more secondary matters, including, for instance: mutual recognition (the valuing of known over unknown persons); reverence through ritual (the value of sustaining invented social forms); truth telling (a late arrival when doubts began to set in); and so on.

Thus these first common 'places', or 'providential spaces', are to do not with 'seeing' in common, but with 'feeling' in common, that is, with the 'giving' or 'lending' of a shared *significance* to shared *feelings* in an *already shared* circumstance – thus providing, as it were, not only a sufficiently large 'container' within which a set of different activities can all fit and be seen as the same, but also a sense in terms of which to *judge* their fittingness. In other words, the first mute language is the immediate responsive representation in gesture, in bodily movement, of a moment or place of common reference, where the bodily movement functions *metaphorically*, not to refer to something already known about, but to indicate an 'is', to *establish* a 'something' with common significance.

Two points follow from this. The first is to do with the properties of joint action: its ability to generate a providential space that all those involved experience themselves as 'in'. The second is to do with, as we have already mentioned, our being able to 'look through' certain words and see connections that would otherwise be invisible to us – only now, I want to emphasize that this function inheres in the word's 'movement', not its form.

To turn to the fact that joint action seems to generate a feeling of 'being judged'. As both Volosinov and Bakhtin mention, at various points in their writing, it is in the very character of dialogue to create a kind of third containing-and-judging entity.

> Any utterance always has an addressee (of various sorts, with varying degrees of proximity, concreteness, awareness, and so forth), whose responsive understanding the author of the work seeks and surpasses. This is the second party ([but] not in the arithmetical sense). But in addition to this addressee (the second party), the author of the utterance, with the greater of lesser awareness, presupposes a higher *superaddressee* (third), whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance, or in distant historical time . . .
>
> (Bakhtin, 1986: 126)

At other points in their writings, Bakhtin and Volosinov talk of this third entity as the author's "hero." The trouble is, authors do not just write *about* their heroes from the outside: "such is the nature of all active creative experiences: they experience their object [their hero] and experience themselves *in* their object" (Bakhtin, 1990: 7).

Regarding intonation, the outcome is the same: Volosinov (1976: 99–103) discusses a paradigm we might be tempted to substitute for Vico's. Two people, fed up with a long winter, sitting in a room in May, look out of the window, only to

see it snowing. Then one of them says: "Well!" The other does not respond.[15] To whom is this reproach addressed, asks Volosinov? For it voices not only passive dissatisfaction, but also active indignation and reproach – and the speaker's friend cannot be blamed for the snow! "This tack of the intonational movement patently makes an opening in the situation for a *third participant* . . . [however] the 'hero' of this verbal production has not yet assumed a full and definite shape . . ." (Volosinov, 1976: 103). What is created here is, like Vico's imaginative universal, says Volosinov, an "intonational metaphor," an image *through* which we can begin to see the character of the hero.

The second point I want to make connects directly with this. For what Vico outlines, above, is a poetic image, a metaphor, *through* which – as in Volosinov's intonational metaphor above, in which the third participant in the joint action is seen as responsible for the snow, and thus blameworthy and reproachable like another person – one might begin to understand the *mute*, extraordinary, common-sense basis for an articulate language. Such a basis constitutes the unsystematized, primordial contents of the human mind, its basic paradigms or prototypes, its providential spaces. These are the sensory topics or commonplaces that make up the basis of a community's *sensus communis* – in terms of which our first words can have their sense, and against which, much later, the adequacy of our concepts may be judged.

Let me explore the notion of metaphor further. Vico was particularly interested in what might be called "civic rhetoric" and the problem of what constituted good government (Mooney, 1985; Schaeffer, 1990), but he developed his views against a background within which the tradition of rhetoric was under attack by the new "geometric method" of reasoning promoted by the Cartesians. And to an extent, his arguments constitute a counter-attack upon it, for he saw it as completely inimical to his concerns. In his *On the Study Methods of Our Time* (first published in 1709), he defends rhetoric on many grounds, but particularly on the grounds of the necessity for eloquence in one's speech: quoting Cardinal Ludvico Madruzzi, Vico (1965: 36) says: "Rulers should see to it not only that their actions are true and in conformity with justice, but that they *seem* to be so" to everyone. In other words, those who *are* satisfied with abstract truth alone, and do not bother to find out whether their opinion is shared by the generality of people, cause political calamities. Thus, not only should politicians judge human actions as they actually *are*, rather than in terms of what they think they *ought* to be, they should also – in terms of the *sensus communis* – be able eloquently to persuade the people of their judgement's correctness. But how might such persuading be done? What is involved in our accepting (if not the absolute truth) the truth of a claim relative to our current circumstances?

Here we are back again at our original problem – the understanding of that speech which, rather than simply influencing us in our intellects, 'moves' us to accept its claims in our very being – but now in a somewhat better position to formulate its nature. The problem arises when we attempt to give *reasons* for any claims we may make, for why should what we say be experienced as us giving reasons, let alone ones that constitute a *proof* of our claims?

They are accepted, suggests Vico (here following Aristotle 1991: 75–7), not

because we as speakers supply a demonstrable proof, a full syllogistic structure which our listeners are passively compelled (logically) to accept, but because in their incomplete, enthymemic structure, we offer initially unconnected premises that (most of) our audience will be able to connect up for us – and feel that it is they who have 'seen' the point! They themselves make the connection by drawing upon the (perhaps in themselves inarticulable) *topoi* in the *sensus communis* already existing between them and us as speakers – in fact, once again, a process of joint action is involved! This is why, for Vico, in rhetoric, what he calls the "art of topics" (*ars topica*) is important. For 'argument' in this art

> is not 'the arrangement of a proof', as commonly assumed, what in Latin is known as *argumentatio*; rather, it is that third idea which is found to tie together the two in the issue being debated – what in the Schools is called the 'middle term' – such that topics is the art of finding the middle term. But I claim more: Topics is the art of apprehending the true, for it is the art of seeing all the aspects or *loci* of a thing that enable us to distinguish it well and gain an adequate concept of it. For judgments turn out to be false when their concepts are either greater or lesser than the things they propose to signify . . .
>
> (Vico, 1988: 178 – although I have preferred Mooney's (1985: 134) translation here)

So the special nature of the speech that we use here works to create the 'providential space', in which a 'proof' can come into existence as such. Grassi (1980: 20), a Vico scholar, characterizes this kind of speech as

> immediately a 'showing'[16] – and for this reason 'figurative' or 'imaginative', and thus in the original sense 'theoretical' [*theorin* – i.e., to see]. It is metaphorical, i.e., it shows something which has a sense, and this means that to the figure, to that which is shown, the speech transfers [*metapherein*] a signification;[17] in this way the speech which realizes this showing 'leads before the eyes' [*phainesthai*] a significance.

This, says Grassi, is *true rhetorical speech*; it is non-conceptual, moving and indicative; it functions not just persuasively but practically: the metaphor is central to it. In transferring[18] significance from the *sensus communis* to what is said, a metaphor makes 'visible' or 'shows' listeners a common quality that is not rationally deducible. As such, it cannot be 'explained' (either from within an academic discourse, or in any other way); indeed, it is the speech which is the basis of all rational thought. Thus, it is with such a way of talking that we must begin all our investigations.[19]

Metaphors and models: conversation and discourse

If we turn now to the task of distinguishing between *conversation* and *academic discourse*, it is perhaps already obvious in general how the two will differ. First, practical conversation works primarily in terms of *sense*, whereas academic discourses work increasingly (as they develop) in terms of forms. Second, practical conversation does not have a "subject matter," it is 'rooted' or "variously rooted"[20] in a *sensus communis*, while, academic discourses claim somehow (due, as suggested in Chapter 1, to the *ex post facto* fact fallacy) to have floated free of such an embedding and to be 'based' in certain supposedly undeniable properties of a "subject matter." Third, practical conversation need not work in terms of mental representations, while academic discourses must. I shall examine certain aspects of this whole process further in the next chapter, but I want to discuss this last property further here, that is, why it seems to be of importance for the subject matter of a discourse to be 'surveyable' (Wittgenstein) by an individual in rational contemplation.

Indeed, we can define an academic discourse as a rational body of speech or writing, a set of *ordered* statements, that provides a systematic way of representing, for the purposes of disciplined, academic inquiry, a particular kind of knowledge about an entity, that is, not just knowledge that is 'accountable', or which can be rendered "rationally-visible" on the spot when required, but also knowledge which enables us "to *see* how things [within the subject matter of the discourse] hang together."[21] Where a discourse is systematized around not just a single focal image or commonplace, but – in Rorty's (1989) terms – a 'literalized'[22] version of it, a 'picture'. Where it is a 'picture' that provides the 'basis' for a special type of representational language game, not only one 'within' which rational persuasion is possible (in a way, he claims, is impossible in ordinary conversation), but one in which one can provide both explanations and predictions. And until now, our academic discourses have been formed in this way.

But, following Wittgenstein (1953), there are not one but two ways in which we might attempt to investigate and assemble the properties of a supposed 'subject matter' to 'see' how they 'hang together': in terms of a model (or a grammatical picture),[23] or in terms of a "perspicuous representation."

Let me discuss both these in turn. The important point about a model (or a grammatical picture) is this: because one knows ahead of time that all its parts do as a matter of fact hang together in an orderly way, it seems that it is only the *laws* or *principles* of the order in which they do so that is in question. It is thus possible with a model – for example, the 'picture' of the mathematical set as a container or enclosure – to introduce an idea with a few illustrated examples, and then to assume that the idea is completely understood in its full generality.[24] But as Bloor (1975: 121–2) illustrates, this is far from the truth. Although it may seem – with the 'picture' of a bounded area as a model of the mathematical set in mind, for instance – that the assertion "the whole is greater than the part" is an undeniable conceptual truth, this is not so. For as soon as we come to consider the case of an infinitely long series of integer numbers, we realize that we can put the endless series of even numbers in one-to-one correspondence with the integers in a way which will never break down. But the series of even numbers is 'contained in' the series of integers, isn't it?

As Bloor shows, this 'contradiction' was transmuted into a 'definition' (of what

it is for a set to be infinite) by a 'renegotiation': it became perfectly intelligible to think that when a part *is* 'similar' to the whole, then the set is infinite – taking the image of one-to-one correspondence now as the 'picture' of what 'similarity' is.

In mathematics, we make many such models. For instance, we can mentally 'look' at the points on a straight line and can imagine at least a number of them stretching off in either direction, and assume that wherever on the line we might look, they would be everywhere the same. Thus, as individuals, we can construct a 'view', a God's-eye view, of the line, and assume what it 'must' be like everywhere along its length, that is to say, the *order* will continue everywhere the same. These moves in mathematics, and in many other spheres, are perfectly benign as long as the phenomena being dealt with *are* in fact genuinely orderly, and the problem is just to find the form of their order; they allow us to act – indeed, they channel us (as individuals) into acting – in a way which conforms to that order ahead of time. But this is precisely Wittgenstein's point: when the phenomena of interest to us are *not* already orderly, when they are – like the everyday life of human beings – somewhat chaotic, or only partially ordered, then we run into trouble. And, of course, a significant part of Wittgenstein's philosophical effort went into showing the consequences of such 'bewitchments'.

It is not our purpose, however, to explore such 'bewitchments' further here, but to question how else might we proceed, if not in terms of 'grammatical pictures' or models. His answer is in terms of "perspicuous representations" – a way of making sense of things that we are unable to do on our own, a way that relies upon people 'seeing' things in the same way as each other by the use of metaphors.

One of the metaphors Wittgenstein introduces in *Philosophical Investigations* for our language is as a somewhat disorderly city. We can see it as an ancient city, as "a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight and regular streets and uniform houses" (1953: no. 18). And that he sometimes himself saw it in just this way is evidenced by the fact that, just after saying that "a main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of words" (1953: no. 122), he went on to say, "a philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about'" (1953: no. 123).

But how might talk of our language as being like an ancient city be of any help to us? No identifiable ancient city is mentioned, and ancient cities in general lack any already well-known order. So, if it is the case that an ancient city is a good metaphor (one among a number of others he offers) for our language, what does it teach us about the character of language? Well, if we cannot command a clear view of its street plan (from a vantage point outside it, or from a map), we can still get to know quite a lot about it from living within it . . . Vico's point! We can get to know certain prominent landmarks and, by approaching them from different directions, use them as fixed points of reference for more adventurous excursions. To be sure of its character, however, we must fill in details of the streets and houses in between (for we cannot assume an already given order); and this will take time. We might need, in fact, to dig down and to investigate some of the archeological layers,

and so on. In other words, as a metaphor of our language, it may not tell us *all* we want to know about it, but it does suggests to us – at least, to those of us who know what it is like to live in a city – quite a number of important points about how we might get to know about our knowledge of our own language better.

In Wittgenstein's (1953: no. 122) terms, it functions as a "perspicuous representation," where the point of such a representation is that it

> produces just that understanding which consists in 'seeing connections'. Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate cases*.
>
> The concept of perspicuous representation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things.

And, as for Wittgenstein (and for Vico), so for us. Those metaphors which 'touch' upon the sensory topics making up our embodied common sense can, in a "joint action" between us and those who present them, open up for us a 'space' in which we can 'see' as they see, that is, make sense and give the same kind of form to our feelings as they give to theirs.

We are now in a position to distinguish between a conversational reality and the 'reality' of an academic discourse. To the individuals socialized into it, an academic discourse provides the possibility of being able (after enough hermeneutical work upon the discipline's texts)[25] to build up a systematic mental image of its 'subject matter', of being able to 'survey' it. It may be a fictitious 'reality', a possible and/or imaginary reality, but, like any good science fiction novel, one can get a 'sense' of its nature from within the texts of the discipline. Indeed, we can get a 'sense' of what activities it would support if it were truly real; thus, from within it, we can discover further 'facts' in its support. Hence our possibility of 'testing' it. Thus it is in this sense that an academic discourse can be said to *represent* a supposedly underlying, or otherwise hidden, reality . . . a reality with an *essence*. As Wittgenstein (1953: no. 92) says, this 'essence' is

> not something that already lies open to view and that becomes surveyable by a rearrangement, but something that lies *beneath* the surface. Something that lies within, which we see when we look *into* the thing, and which analysis digs out.

Thus, academic discourses, to adapt Foucault's expression,[26] form as *systematic* objects the objects of which they speak, that is, form them as mental representations.

By contrast, the participants in everyday conversations may have a 'sense' of what they are talking about, even a 'joint sense', but speakers do not 'discipline' their talk in terms of a single grammatical picture. If one figure of speech proves unintelligible, another is tried. If there is an *order* in conversation, then it is one of a very different kind to that available in a God's-eye view, a surveyable order. In a conversation, people do know what they are talking about, but as Garfinkel (1967: 40) puts it: 'the matter talked about' is an event that is developing and developed within the course of the conversation producing it; furthermore, those producing it, know in practice, that is, *from within* this development, both the 'how' and the 'what' of

its production; indeed, in being (responsively) aware of each other's (responsive) understanding in the process, they know how to play their own part in its further development. And they can do all this without any reference to any inner mental representations, to any inner theories; their 'embodied' linguistic reactions are sufficient.

Conclusion: psychology and the demise of the epistemology project

Although the "epistemology project" – the idea that knowledge is to be seen as the correct *representation* of an independent reality – is currently under attack, not all are agreed as to where, precisely, the main force of that attack should be focused. Some (such as Rorty, 1980), see epistemology as primarily concerned with providing *foundations* for claims to knowledge. Thus on this interpretation, overcoming epistemology simply means abandoning "a desire for constraint," a desire which, in the vocabulary of the epistemological project itself, is "a desire to find 'foundations' to which one might cling, frameworks beyond which one must not stray, objects which impose themselves, representations which cannot be gainsaid" (Rorty, 1980: 315). Others, and here I have in mind Charles Taylor (1984, 1987), as well as Heidegger (1967) and Foucault (1970), have a different, and ultimately more radically important focus. They see the commitment to knowledge as representation, as always involving the inner, orderly 'depiction' or 'picturing' of an outer reality, as the central feature of the epistemological tradition. As Taylor (1984: 18) points out, a corollary of this view that is important for us – given our interest in conversation – is that we "construe our awareness and understanding of each other on the same representational model . . . in terms of a *theory* that I hold about you and the meaning of your words."

With whom should we align ourselves? Well, if we do away with shared frameworks, shared beliefs, shared values; if we give up appealing to the reality of objects (that is, we stop kicking stones), if we make no more appeals to conceptual truths, can we still find some 'foundations' for ourselves? In fact, the answer seems to be "Yes. In the *sensus communis* of the human *Umwelt*." We are not limited, as Rorty seems to think, to simply trying to make the other guy's way of talking "look bad," and our own "look good." There is a 'basis' for our talk, a 'background' from within which we make sense of our lives, a realm of knowledgeable activity which is sustained, not simply by a form of practical-technical knowledge, nor by a form of theoretical-conceptual knowledge, but a third kind of practical-moral knowledge of a non-conceptual kind. The study of this third, background, sphere of human activity is not easy. "We cannot", as Taylor (1987: 477) points out, "turn the background from which we think into an object for us." We face a new task, whose excellence consists in that of attempting "to articulate the background of our lives perspicuously" (1987: 481) – where, as Wittgenstein (1953: no. 122) puts it, "a perspicuous representation [i.e., the provision of an apposite metaphor or image] produces just that understanding which consists in 'seeing connections.'"

Harré, in insisting that "the primary human reality is persons in conversation," has confronted us with a problem that will not go away, but which cannot be solved with available representational-referential 'theories' or 'methods': namely, the problem of how a common 'sense' is established and sustained, the problem of specifying its conditions of possibility. Lacking a *systematic representation* of its nature, interested only in what we, as individual academics, can 'picture', we have failed to 'see' its importance; the nature of the social process involved in its creation and sustenance has been rationally-invisible to us. It has been all but destroyed in well-meaning projects that, because they must be justified within the prevailing 'rationality', work to intensify monologic, systematic, theoretical, surveyable 'realities' of the individual mind – realities which can be thought, but in which people cannot live.