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**TOWARD A THIRD REVOLUTION IN PSYCHOLOGY:  
FROM INNER MENTAL REPRESENTATIONS TO DIALOGICALLY  
STRUCTURED SOCIAL PRACTICES**

John Shotter

It is then that the reader asks that crucial question, 'What's it all about?' But what 'it' is, of course, is not the actual text... but the text the reader has constructed under its sway And that is why the actual text needs the subjunctivity that makes it possible for a reader to create a world of his own. (Bruner, 1986: 37)

The present - the concreteness of the present - as a phenomenon to consider, as a *structure*, is for us an unknown planet; so we can neither hold on to it in our memory nor reconstruct it through imagination. We die without knowing what we have lived. (Kundera, 1993:129)

Only in the stream of thought and life do words have meaning. (Wittgenstein, 1981: §. 173)

Just as in writing we learn a particular form of letters and then vary it later, so we learn first the stability of things as a norm, which is then subject to alteration. (Wittgenstein, 1969: §. 473)

One of our tasks in understanding another person is to do justice to the uniqueness of their otherness. But this is not easy, for it is only in the particular, dialogically structured events that occur between us in fleeting moments, that we can grasp who and what they are. What is involved in making sense of people's behavior by focusing its unique and unrepeatable aspects is the central topic of this chapter.[end.167]

Jerome Bruner refers to the nature of such fleeting moments in his essay, 'Two modes of thought' There, he contrasts the 'paradigmatic mode of thinking', employed in mathematics and logic, with the 'narrative mode of thought', which in its 'imaginative application... leads to good stories, gripping drama, believable (though not necessarily "true") historical accounts'. Narrative 'strives', he says, 'to put its timeless miracles into the particularities of experience, and to locate the experience in time and place', and he adds that Joyce 'thought of the particularities of the story as epiphanies of the ordinary' (Bruner 1986:13). This focus on the innumerable and subtle details in each transitory moment, and on the special nature of the ordinary, will be crucial in what follows.

Milan Kundera, writing on the novel, also emphasizes the significance of the unique and the transitory. He writes.

It is a *discovery* that might be termed *ontological*: the discovery of the present moment; the discovery of the perpetual coexistence of the banal and the dramatic that underlies our lives... [I]n a single second, between two lines of dialogue, endless numbers of things occur... [and] a single second of the present becomes a little infinity. (Kundera, 1993: 131)

In the reality of each present moment, continuously created and re-created as we spontaneously respond to

others and otherness around us, is a whole complexly structured set of rich and meaningful relations, a world. The strange and surprisingly comprehensive consequences of these claims will become clear as we proceed. But let me straightaway link them to Rirther aspects of Bruner's recent work to locate him in the current dialogue on the dialogical.

In *Acts of Meaning*, Bruner discusses the problem of how 'cultural psychology', as he calls it, should 'go about posing the problem of the Self?' (1990:116). He suggests this imposes two related requirements. First, we must focus 'upon the *meanings* in terms of which Self is defined *both* by the individual *and* by the culture in which he or she participates'. But this, he adds, is insufficient. For if we are to grasp how we can each negotiate a 'Self with those around us, we must also understand the continuously changing 'opportunities for', and 'constraints upon', self-development that we present each other as the living exchanges between us unfold. Thus his second requirement is that we 'attend to the *practices* in which "the meanings of Self" are achieved and put to use', and he adds that a focus on these practices will lead us to a view of the self 'distributed in action, in projects, in practice' (1990:116-17).

Also relevant here is Bruner's emphasis on what he calls the 'subjunctivizing' strategies (talk of possibility) so often used in literary texts (Bruner, 1986: 26). These strategies are also of great importance in our practices of Self For, in rendering what we say 'indeterminate,' the use of such strategies allows (as Bruner points out, quoting Iser, 1978), "a spectrum of actualizations" ... [so that] literary texts initiate "performances" of meaning rather than actually formulating meanings themselves' (Bruner 1986: 25). Such indeterminate expressions allow those communicating to render [end.168]their meanings uniquely determinate between themselves, to make their meanings fit their own particular circumstances. It is in such performances of meaning, in our bodily living-out of our specific reactions and rejoinders to another's expressions of possibility, that we not only create unique meanings between us, but also co-author new Selves for ourselves. As George Steiner puts it, "The "otherness" which enters into us makes us other' (1989:188). Alone, as isolated individuals, we cannot create any new meanings for our actions; such meanings are made in the living activities between ourselves and others. Only those who are 'other' to us can call out from us responses we could never call from ourselves.

### **Meaning in motion: boundary crossings**

#### *The need for new practices of inquiry*

Bruner's approach to our practices of Self draws our attention to important issues in these increasingly multicultural times. Almost all of us are now members of more than one active culture. Thus the experience of having to 'cross' cultural boundaries, to 'shift one's stance', to view one's surroundings, fleeting aspect by fleeting aspect, from more than a single perspective, has become 'normal'. We have now to make sense of our surroundings, while continually being ourselves 'in motion'. But how should academics and intellectuals respond to the dialogical, aspectual circumstances in which we now live in order to heed the 'practices of Self that Bruner outlines? Can we apply our old and well-tried methods to this new topic? Or must we invent novel methods, different modes of inquiry'?

Our current intellectual methods require us set ourselves apart from those we study and view them as if from afar. We aspire to look upon their activities as already completed achievements, aiming to predict the future by finding regularities in the past. But can we any longer even pretend to do this? Should we not find a more participatory way in which to relate ourselves to the phenomena of our studies, one that allows a better awareness of our own relations to, and involvement in, what we are studying? Must we not recognize the unfinished, incomplete, ongoing nature of all of our engagements'?

Bruner and Kundera remind us that our current methods are monological and individualistic, and that we moderns think we are fully ourselves only when set over against our surroundings as solitary thinkers. But they also show that we import mythic abstractions of our own making into our accounts of what happens around us. It is as if we were observed some turn-taking game - say tennis - and, failing to realize that

the players act in response to each other, tried to explain their activities as if they originated solely from within them as self-contained individuals (Sampson, 1993).

It is the hegemony of this method over us - that of trying to explain the causes of events in terms of our own abstractions from them - that I seek to undo in what follows. Instead of arguing like Rom Harre' (this volume), that it is a second, discursive revolution that we now require, I suggest [end.169] that we abandon these individualistic and monological, theory-driven methods. Only if we institute a third revolution of a dialogical kind, one that suggests wholly new intellectual practices and institutions to us can we begin to fashion forms of inquiry that will do justice to the uniqueness of the being of others. But first, let me recount some history, for such institutional changes have their own problems, as Bruner's own history illustrates (Bruner, 1983).

### *The institutional dominance of the paradigmatic*

I first met Jerry in 1972 when I was in the Psychology Department in Nottingham, soon after he came to England to the newly established Watts Professorship at Oxford. Our paths had already become intertwined, as I had earlier arranged for my then research student, David Wood, to do postdoctoral work with Jerry in Harvard (they later produced Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). Nottingham at that time had a lively child development research unit established by John and Elizabeth Newson (its work is well represented in Newson & Newson, 1975). From 1969, prompted by the feeling that Chomsky's (1957, 1965) brilliant analyses of linguistic structure were somehow beside the point to the real life of language acquisition, we focused on detailed videotape analysis of mother-child interaction, looking at mothers showing their children, often to twenty months, how to put shapes into form boards. This work was pioneered by Susan Treble (later Susan Gregory; see Shotter and Gregory, 1976). Influenced by Vygotsky's (1962) notions of instruction, mediation, and the internalization of the social, and by Merleau-Ponty's (1962) account of intersubjectivity, we discussed the amazing social, joint, relational (or 'distributed' as Bruner (1996:154)) now calls them) phenomena that were created between caretaker and child, for which neither could be seen as individually responsible.

But we were still somewhat at sea, aware that we were not doing experiments or testing hypotheses as such, that we were not able to present measurements or 'objective data'. It was clear that there was something here of great importance not captured in previous, more hardnosed approaches, but we did not know how publicly to present what we were observing. We badly lacked a leader and protector Jerry's arrival in England gave us the focus we needed. The Developmental Psychology Section of the British Psychology Society was formed. Nottingham, Cambridge, Edinburgh, and Oxford combined to run a kind of travelling workshop/seminar. Suddenly, the field of social-developmental psychology was up and running, and - to those of us within it between 1972 and 1976 - it was the most intellectually exciting arena in the whole of psychology. As Bruner remarks in his autobiography, the workshop/seminar meetings 'shine in memory' (Bruner 1983:166). But something went wrong, and for twenty years the movement lost the shine it is only now beginning to regain. It succumbed to tendencies at work, not just in academic psychology, but also in the institutions of our modernist, Western societies at large: the repression of the dialogical by the monological, the practical by the theoretical, the particular by the universal, and the unique moment by the repeatable.[end.170]

Acutely aware of the dialogical, the concrete, and the particular, and of their tension with the mainstream, Bruner has nonetheless given expression to them in his writings 'for the left-hand' as he calls them (Bruner 1962/1979). However, he has never allowed both 'right-' and 'left-handed' sides of his intellectual character to be equally present in his professional thinking at once. Instead of pursuing the conversation with otherness, instead of seeing it as a continual source of new possibilities, he has always switched to seeing it as a 'problem-requiring-a-solution'. In other words, he has always privileged the paradigmatic over the narrative mode of thought, quelling the tendency to disorderly playfulness in favor of order, seeking the mastery of meaning by form, while never fully articulating the consequences of so doing. Thus, although Bruner has continually identified important, new departures for our investigations in academic psychology - new topics to which we have all, sooner or later, come to pay attention - he has also too quickly sought to corral his own unruly, left-handed encounters with the particularities of otherness. He has not dwelt long enough on their strangeness. To use his own words in describing the paradigmatic mode of thought, he

has sought 'to transcend the particular by higher and higher reaching for abstraction', to privilege explanation over description (Bruner, 1986: 13). As a result, he has also drawn back from giving us the dialogical, relational psychology I think we need - a psychology in which both left and right hand work in concerted action.

### *Psychology technicalized and demoralized*

We find Bruner's unruly 'left-handed' tendencies at work at the beginning of his 1990 book, *Acts of Meaning*. It opens with strong criticism of the cognitive revolution - the most long lived and successful of all of psychology's revolutions, which Bruner himself helped engineer (Baars, 1986; Gardner, 1987). He points out that its original impulse was 'to bring "mind" back into the human sciences after a long cold winter of objectivism'. But he proceeds to remark that cognitive psychology 'has now been diverted into issues that are marginal to the impulse that brought it into being' (Bruner, 1990:1). For, what he, George Miller and others sought to realize in establishing the Harvard Center for Cognitive Studies in 1960, was 'to establish meaning as the central concept of psychology - not stimuli and responses, not overtly observable behavior, not biological drives and their transformation, but meaning' (p.2). Thus, in attempting to bring 'mind' back into psychology, Bruner did not just want to add 'a little mentalism' to behaviorism, but something much more profound to discover and describe 'what meaning-making processes were implicated' in people's encounters with the world, 'to prompt psychology to joining forces with its sister interpretative disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences' (1990: 2). But even in the early stages of the cognitive revolution, he laments, the 'emphasis began shifting from "meaning" to "information", from the *construction* of meaning to the *processing* of information. These are profoundly different matters' (p.4). And in *Acts of Meaning*, [end.171] and also *The Culture of Education* (1996), he begins to outline how he thinks that original impulse can be recaptured and revitalized. For, as he sees it, the revolution in psychology 'has been technicalized in a manner that even undermines that original impulse' (1990: 1).

But how can it be recaptured? Precisely by attending to many points that Bruner himself has made, but without, I suggest, succumbing to his temptation to turn too early to the requirements of our current institutionalized academic practices. In other words, instead of trying to *explain* what makes our performances of meaning possible by theories, we must turn to another approach, one to do with achieving a much more direct form of understanding, the kind of relational understanding in fact at work, spontaneously, in our everyday practices.

### **The movement of meaning in dialogic encounters**

#### *The performance of variational meanings*

The kind of understanding at issue can be grasped from a story Bruner relates from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (Bruner, 1986: 35-7). Marco Polo tells Kublai Khan of a stone bridge, which he describes stone by stone. Kublai Khan gets impatient and asks what supports the stones? 'The bridge is not supported by one stone or another', Marco answers, 'but by the line of the arch that they form'. 'Why do you speak to me of the stones?', Kublai Khan demands. 'Without stones there is no arch', Polo replies, for the arch is in the *relations* between the stones. As Bruner points out, in her reading of the story, the reader herself:

goes from stones to arches to the significance of arches to some broader reality - goes back and forth between them in attempting finally to construct a sense of the story, its form, its meaning (1986.36).

Sometimes in reading stories, we move from their particularities to something more general, to a structure constituted by the relations between them. As Wittgenstein might have said, we grasp something which is 'shown' in the text rather than explicitly 'said'. But, what kind of textual structures invite such a kind of understanding? And how is it achieved?

It is, Bruner claims, texts of a *narrative* kind that allow us to gain a sense of otherness that is strange and novel to us. In reading such texts, we begin to construct a 'virtual text' of our own. It is if readers

were embarking on a journey without maps... [Where] in time, the new journey becomes a thing in itself, however much its initial shape was borrowed from the past. The virtual text becomes a story of its own, its very strangeness only a contrast with the reader's sense of the ordinary... [This] is why the actual text needs the subjunctivity that makes it possible for a reader to create a world of his [or her] own. (Bruner 1986: 36-37)

To repeat: It is the way in which such texts 'subjunctivize reality', by 'trafficking in human possibilities rather than settled certainties', that makes possible the co-creation of such virtual worlds by authors and their readers.[end.172].

Such trafficking in possibilities is occasioned, Bruner suggests, by making use of the conventions, maxims, and regularities constitutive of our cultural being, though he certainly does not have in mind the mechanical or repetitive observance of such rules. On the contrary, the existence of conventions and maxims provide

us with the means of violating them for purposes of *meaning more than we say* or for meaning other than what we say (as in irony, for example) or for meaning less than we say. (Bruner, 1986 26)

The stability of this background, and the possibility of deviation, is emphasized again in *Acts of Meaning*, where Bruner comments on his own efforts to describe a people's 'folk psychology' as follows:

I wanted to show how human beings, in interacting with one another, form a sense of the canonical and ordinary as a background against which to interpret and give narrative meaning to breaches in and deviations from 'normal' states of the human condition. (Bruner, 1990: 67)

It is the very creation of indeterminacy and uncertainty that makes it possible for people to cocreate new and unique meanings as their dialogical activities unfold. 'To mean in this way', suggests Bruner, 'by the use of such intended violations.. is to create "gaps" and to recruit presuppositions to fill them' (1986: 26). Indeed, our unique responses to our own unique circumstances are carried by the subtle variations in how we use these constitutive forms of response as we bodily react to what goes on around us. This is what it is for us to *perform meaning*. Our 'performed meanings' are 'shown' in our ways of 'going on' with others around us in practice.

I shall call such joint, first-time meanings - meanings which are expressive of the 'world' of a unique 'I' - *variational* meanings. For they are only intelligible as variations within the already existing, ongoing, background flow of activity constitutive of our current forms of life. Bakhtin calls such events '*once-occurrent events of Being*' (1993: 2).<sup>1</sup> The very indeterminacy in a narrative text allows 'readers' to render their meanings uniquely determinate themselves, to make their meanings relate to their own particular circumstances.

Bruner's emphasis on the living 'playing out' of understanding is central to Wittgenstein's whole philosophy, and to Bakhtin's (1981) and Voloshinov's (1986) dialogical approach to speech communication (see Shotter and Billig, in press). What I want to pursue further here is the non-referential, non-representational, non-conceptual, 'moving', 'poetic' nature of these practical forms of meaning and understanding.

In exploring how we perform meaning in practice, in the context of a discussion of 'intention', Wittgenstein suggests that we might feel tempted to say that an intention 'can do what it is supposed to only by containing an extremely faithful picture of what it intends'. He continues, however,

That that too does not go far enough, because a picture, whatever it may be, can be variously interpreted; hence this picture too in its turn stands isolated. When one has the picture in view by itself it is suddenly dead, and it is as if something had been taken away from it, which had given it life before.. it remains [end.173]isolated, it does not point outside itself to a reality beyond. Now one says: 'Of course, it is not the picture itself that intends, but we who use it to intend something'. But if this intending, this meaning, is in turn something that is done with the picture, then I cannot see why it has to involve a human being The process of digestion can also be studied as a chemical process, independently of whether it takes place in a living being We want to say 'Meaning is surely essentially a mental process, a process of conscious life, not of dead matter'... And now it seems to us as if intendin~ could not be any process at all, of any kind whatever. - For what we are dissatisfied with here is the grammar *of process*, not with the specific kind of process. - It could be said: we should call any process 'dead' in this sense. (Wingenstein, 1981: § 236)

And he adds: 'It might almost be said. "Meaning *moves*, whereas a process stands still" (§. 237).

### *Meaning as movement*

Wittgenstein sees meaning, not as a cognitive process of statically 'picturing' something, but as part of a dynamic, interactive process in which embodied agents continuously react in a living, practical way to each other and to their circumstances. Thus, even as a person is speaking, the responses of the others around them influence them moment by moment in shaping their unfolding talk. In such circumstances, we inevitably do much more than talk 'about' something; we continuously live out changing 'ways of relating' of our own creation, or as Wittgenstein would say, we are create particular 'forms of life' .<sup>2</sup>

Thus, we perform meaning in practice as we tuck back and forth between the particular words of a strange, newly encountered, meaning-indeterminate text, and the whole of the ongoing, unsayable, dynamic cultural history in which we all are in different ways immersed. In 'bridging the gaps' with our responsive movements as we read, we creatively 'move' over what Bruner (1986) calls the 'landscapes' of a 'virtual text' And these 'ways of moving' of our spontaneous creation are what is general in our reading, what we can 'carry over' into other activities. They are ways of 'orchestrating' our ever changing relations to our past, our future, others around us, our immediate physical surroundings, authorities, our cultural history, our dreams for the future - ways of relating ourselves in these different directions perceptually, cognitively, in action, in memory, and so on (see Vygotsky, 1978:1986). We can 'carry over' into new spheres of activity what we 'carried in 'in our initial ways of responding, bodily, to the text.

Such meaning-indeterminate texts, viewed as calling from us new responsive movements rather than as being *about* something in the world, are a special part of the world to which we cannot but relate in a living way. So, although such texts may seem to be similar to those purporting to be 'about' something - texts a representational-referential meaning that 'pictures' states of affairs in the world - their meaning does not reside in such picturing. We must relate to them differently. For their meaning is more practical, pre-theoretical, pre-conceptual; they provide us with style [end.174]of knowing, rather than with knowledge of something in particular Such texts are exemplary for, not *of* certain ways of going on. They exemplify new ways of relating to our circumstances; they provide not representations of things already in existence, but new poetic images *through* which to make sense of things.

Consider Susan Sontag's remarks on the creative effects of works of art upon us:

To become involved with a work of art entails, to be sure, the experience of detaching oneself from the world. But the work of art itself is also a vibrant, magical, and exemplary object which returns us to the world in some way more open and enriched... Raymond Bayer has written: 'What each and every aesthetic object imposes on us, in appropriate rhythms, is a unique and singular formula for the flow of our energy... Every work of art embodies a

principle of proceeding, of stopping, of scanning; an image of energy or relaxation, the imprint of a caressing or destroying hand which is [the artist's] alone'. We can call this the physiognomy of the work, or its rhythm, or, as I would rather do, its style (1962: 28).

Such a 'moving' form of communication not only makes a unique, previously unwitnessed other present to us, but enables a new 'way of going on' that only *it* can call from us. But this requires us to encounter its distinct nature in all its complex detail. If we turn too quickly to its *explanation*, we miss what it alone can teach us. And the turn is pointless, for we literally do not yet know *what* we are talking about.

Only if we enter into an extended, unfolding set of living relations with an other (say, another person, or with a picture like Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, or a text) can we come to a feel grasp of what it means to us. And what we sense in such a set of relations, we sense from *inside*. As Wittgenstein puts it, when a picture has meaning for us, it is as if

we looked at a picture so as to enter into it and the objects in it surrounded us like real ones... In this way, when we intend, we are surrounded by our intention's pictures, and we are inside them (1981: §233).

Indeed, he says elsewhere:

It often strikes us as if in grasping meaning the mind made small rudimentary movements, like someone irresolute who does not know which way to go - i.e, it tentatively reviews the field of possible applications (1981: §. 33).

In going up to someone to meet them, in writing about an experience, or in intensely studying a work of art there is an oscillating, shifting, fluid inner complexity that until recently psychology has ignored.

### **Describing (and explaining?) the dialogical - 'the difficulty here is: to stop'**

#### *The temptation to explain*

Why has psychology ignored the fleeting fullness of the present? Because it is terribly difficult to focus on the details of a practice in the course of doing it. Crucial in our early work in Nottingham was our use of [end.175]video-tape recordings. We watched the same transitory moments over and over again to capture ever more detail, and once we had learned to see such events on videotape, we learned to see them in the everyday world as well. In the same way, ethnomethodology could not have established itself without audio tape recorders. For crucial encounters with each other and our surroundings flit by so quickly and are distributed between us to such an extent that we have no distinct sense their effect on us or our effect on them. It is thus difficult to focus on the performance of meaning as a social practice, to see the 'events of meaning' as they are. Thus, we assume that there must be something mysterious within them that cannot be observed and we *theorize* about their nature. This is where Wittgenstein's work is so important, for he points to how, in our ordinary social practices, we draw each other's attention to aspects of our own ongoing practices. Attending to previously unnoticed aspects of our practices is the major way we elaborate and refine them. Indeed, this is crucial in our learning such practices in the first place. Hence Wittgenstein's admonition 'don't think but look!' when we feel tempted to assume that our practices *must* have a certain character to them (1953: §66).

Although the task of looking for the fleeting, once-occurrent details of our interactions is not easy, it is the crux. For, as Wittgenstein puts it, the problems we face are not empirical problems to be solved by giving *explanations*:

they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings' *in spite of* an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have already

known. (1953: §.109)

It is not that we seek the *nature* of an object already in existence, but how we ourselves *constitute* our relations to each other and to our surroundings. We want a better understanding of our own forms of life, for so far in our everyday dealings with each other they have passed us by unnoticed. Thus, for Wittgenstein, our task is not to imagine, and then to investigate empirically the 'mechanisms' within us, which we suppose responsible for our communicative abilities. Instead, we must *describe* how in fact we do it in practice, for after all, meaning is a human achievement. Everything of importance in our practices of meaning must always have been in some way available to us. Wittgenstein writes, 'How do sentences do it? Don't you know? For nothing is hidden' (1953: §435).

But, even if nothing is hidden', how can we describe our practices if we cannot view them from outside, if we have only our being within them? All we can do is point out further, previously unnoticed characteristics from within. And we can only do it with the indeterminate, 'poetic' forms of talk we ordinarily use in everyday activities. That is, we can do it with a great deal of first-person, once-occurrent, variational, dialogical talk (Shotter, 1996, 1998). Thus, to gain a better grasp of our practices, we must be content with merely pointing to their crucial aspects from within our own ongoing involvement in them. And, though it is extremely difficult to [end.176]accept this *fact*, once such pointing out has achieved its practical purpose, there is nothing more that can be said with any clarity or distinctness. Thus, the essential aspects of a practice cannot be explained, but only described that is, pointed out in the course of our talk about it -for intelligible explanations can be provided only from within the confines of already established forms of life with their associated language-games. Hence Wittgenstein's remark:

You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean; it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there like our life. (1969: §. 559)

Once we go beyond the confines of established language-games, we are again in the realm of the indeterminate, where our meanings are ambiguous and can be made determinate only by 'playing them out' within a practice. Our language-games cannot themselves be explained, for they set the terms in which explanation is possible.

*Explaining joint action: a 'theory of mind'*

I think Bruner finds the temptation to explain hard to resist, for he seems to find the need to be a scientist h&d to resist also. Thus, to apply what he says about the paradigmatic or logico-scientific mode of thought to his own tendencies, he ultimately 'seeks to transcend the particular by higher and higher reaching for abstraction, and in the end disclaims in principle any explanatory value at all where the particular is concerned' (Bruner, 1986 13). We can see this at many points in his work, but nowhere is this tendency more apparent than in his treatment of *joint* action (a topic in which I have a special interest; see Shotter, 1980, 1984, 1993a, 1993b, 1995).

In *Acts of Meaning*, Bruner writes that:

The division between an 'inner' world of experience and an 'outer' one that is autonomous creates three domains, each of which requires a different form of interpretation... In the first domain we are in some manner 'responsible' for the course of events; in the third not.

There is a second sphere of events that is problematic, comprising some indeterminate mix of the first and third (Bruner, 1990 40-41)

In social theory, we have called the first, the sphere of *action*, to be explained by giving people's *reasons* for their actions, and we have called the third sphere *behavior*, to be explained by its *causes*. Elsewhere, I have called Bruner's second sphere, *joint action*, and related it to Bakhtin's account of dialogically structured



activity, claiming that it is a distinct sphere of activity *sui generis* (Shotter, 1984, 1993 a, 1993b; see Bakhtin 1981). Bruner, however, writes that this second sphere

requires a more elaborate form of interpretation in order to allocate proper causal shares to individual agency and to 'nature'. If folk psychology embodies the interpretative principles of the first domain, and folk physics-cum-biology the third, then the second is ordinarily seen to be governed either by some form of magic or, in contemporary Western culture, by the scientism of physicalist psychology or Artificial Intelligence. (Bruner 1990: 41).[end.177]

In other words, Bruner not only misses the special dialogically structured nature of the second sphere, but assimilates the unique to the repeatable, the particular to the universal, and the practical to the theoretical.

Rather than treating events within the second realm as unique occurrences - new bodily responses that might originate new language-games within which new Selves might be co-created - Bruner treats them as something to be *explained* by extending our 'folk psychology' into what could be called a 'folk human science' (Bruner, 1990: 67). This involves accepting the everyday mental terms we use to talk of psychological matters in our culture, and seeking to discover empirically how we live out our lives in these terms and how children acquire a knowledge of them. Thus, he views us as structuring our psychological lives in terms of 'beliefs', and 'desires' in the following sense:

*we believe* that the world is organized in certain ways, that we *want* certain things, that some things *matter* more than others, and so on... [W]e also believe that people's beliefs and desires become sufficiently coherent and well organized to merit being called 'commitments' or 'ways of life'... [And] personhood is itself a constituent concept of our folk psychology... (Bruner, 1990: 39)

And to account for how we develop such a 'folk psychology,' how we make our 'entry into meaning,' Bruner hypothesizes that even very young children to some extent possess a 'theory of mind'. He writes that:

Nobody doubts that four- or six-year-olds have more mature theories of mind that can encompass what others who are not engaged with them are thinking or desiring. The point, rather, is that even before language takes over as the instrument of interaction one cannot interact *humanly* with others without some protolinguistic 'theory of mind'. (Bruner, 1990: 75)

Bruner is not the only originator of these proposals, as he is the first to admit. Consequently, the fact that they are now at the heart of a major tradition of empirical research in child psychology, cannot be credited wholly to him. Indeed, we can see how the institutional structure of our current academic and intellectual methods and practices 'requires' such notions. Such research is deemed necessary because it is assumed that, as a leading source in the field puts it,

perceptions, emotions, physiological states, and more - are a part of the web of psychological constructs used [by adults and children] to understand and explain action and mind... [They] are centrally organized by consideration of the actor's thoughts and desires. These two sorts of generic mental states are, of course, internal and unobservable But unobservable mental states can often be inferred... (Bartsch and Wellman, 1995: 6)

And it is further taken for granted that adults' everyday talk 'about' mental states, such as beliefs and desires, is unproblematically definitive of their 'commonsense conception of mind' (Bartsch & Wellman, 1995: 5) Given these assumptions, children's everyday talk is inspected for what it reveals about their knowledge of such theoretical states, in themselves and in others. A typical hypothesis under study is the suggestion that 'children go from understanding subjective connections to a later understanding [end.178]of representational mental states' (Bartsch & Wellman, 1995:14), as if the 'proper' or 'natural' set of developmental stages was 'already

there' awaiting discovery.

*Dwelling on joint action instead of trying to explain it*

If Wittgenstein is right, this kind of research is utterly misguided. Our beliefs and desires are not, as Bartsch and Wellman claim, 'of course, internal and unobservable,' but are in fact *shown* in our acting. And what we 'show' in our actions cannot be explained: it is part of the background that makes explanation possible. We have just not yet taught ourselves to see such fleeting 'showings'. That is perhaps more easily said than done. For, in practice, the temptation to solve the puzzles we face by seeking explanations is not easy to avoid, for we do not recognize the character of the puzzles we face.

Exploring the temptation to invoke hidden mental processes in the explanation of meaning, Wittgenstein remarks:

... the difficulty - I might say - is not that of finding [a] solution but rather that of recognizing as the solution something that looks as if it were only a preliminary to it... 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 (1981, §. 314).

Instead of attempting to see behind or beyond events or phenomena, casting them as indicators of something hidden, we must dwell on them, looking ceaselessly over them, responding to them, bodily and dialogically, so that we continuously create within ourselves, not new insights, but new responses and reactions - new language-games, new forms of life, and, as a result, new *movements* of thought. It is in such reactions and their refinements, rather than a proto linguistic theory of mind, that we find the origins and beginnings of children's entry into meaning. As Wittgenstein wrote, 'It is so difficult to find the *beginning*. Or better: it is difficult to begin at the beginning. And not to try to go further back' (1969: §. 471).

If we express ourselves, not by simply reproducing the 'normal' background activities constitutive of our form of life, but by deviating from them in unique, joint action, our task cannot be to develop 'a more elaborate form of interpretation in order to allocate proper causal shares to individual agency and to "nature"' (Bruner, 1990 41). Instead, we must simply attend to the detailed character of such beginnings, and not be tempted to explain them in theoretical terms. This is the importance of Wittgenstein's way of talking, the point of his remarks, which aim, he says, to change our '*way of looking at things*' (1953, §. 144), to give 'prominence to distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook' (1953, §. 132). He is not concerned 'to hunt out new facts', but to 'to *understand* something that is already in plain view. For *this* is what we seem in some sense not to understand' (1953, § 89). And, through his 'poetic' remarks, he wants to draw our attention to 'observations which [end.179]no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes' (1953, §. 415).

What Wittgenstein draws to our attention is that, strangely, we can gain the new kind of *practical understanding* required by using many of the self-same methods we use in our everyday lives, such as the methods adults use to 'instruct' children how to be the kind of persons required in our community (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Shotter, 1984, 1993a, 1993b). So although his methods are as many and various as those we use in life itself, they do in fact have something in common: they all work in just the same way as our 'directive', 'instructive', 'organizational', and 'educative' forms of talk in everyday life. For example, we 'give commands' ('Do this!' 'Don't do that!'); we 'point things out' to people ('Look at this!'); 'remind' them ('Think what happened last time. '); 'change their perspective' ('Look at it like this '); 'organize' their behavior ('First, take a right, then ..'), and so on. All these *instructive* forms of talk 'move' us to do something we would not otherwise do. In 'gesturing' or 'pointing' toward something, they 'move' us to relate ourselves to our circumstances in new ways, to 'orchestrate' our relations to each other and our surroundings in novel and complex ways. The key feature of these forms of talk - what gives them their life - is their *gestural* function in 'calling out' new, dialogical responses from us, responses of a kind shared by others around us, as we spontaneously 'answer to'

events occurring around us. These are the reactions, the new beginnings, from which more complicated 'ways of going on' can be developed.

### Conclusions

In social theory, two major spheres of activity have occupied our attention: individual *actions*, and *behavior*. But now, dialogical phenomena (what Bruner focuses on as narrative), occurring in a sphere between these other two, are coming to constitute a distinct realm of activity requiring its own distinct attention. Such phenomena cannot be accounted for simply as *actions* (for they are not done by individuals and cannot be explained by giving a person's *reasons*), nor can they be treated as just happening' *events* (to be explained by discovering their *causes*). As Bruner himself points out, such events occur in a chaotic zone of indeterminacy between the other two spheres, and as such occurrences in this sphere do not seem amenable to any clear characterizations at all. Yet, although Bruner is at pains to point out that these joint, first-time, variational activities consist in 'some indeterminate mix of the other two,' i.e., of actions or happenings, he does not in the end treat them as a distinct realm of events, as an otherness to be endlessly dwelt on if justice is to be done to its uniqueness. In his 'folk human science', he seeks a specific, explanatory account of this in-between realm.

In celebrating Jerome Bruner's distinguished career, I have sought to display what I see as some of the contradictory and irresolvable tendencies [end.180] in the twists and turns it has taken, twists and turns, I might add, Bruner has made in response to the contradictory tendencies in the institutional practices in academic psychology and the rest of the social sciences. However, one feels the full contradictory nature of these tendencies only if, like Bruner, one lives one's professional psychology in a morally engaged way. And clearly, Bruner does take psychology very seriously, and not just as an academic discipline, but as one of our hopes in passing beyond 'the malaise of futurelessness... the unspoken despair in which we are now living' (Bruner, 1986:148-49). Thus on the horizon of his understandings, determining how he positions himself in psychology, is his concern with our human condition. Hence he worries about psychology becoming too technicalized, for it will then make us once again treat the cultural knowledge of ordinary people as

*just a set of self-assuaging illusions, [rather than as] the culture's beliefs and working hypotheses about what makes it possible and fulfilling for people to live together; even with great personal sacrifice. (Bruner, 1990:32)*

This is why he sees the denigration or neglect of our cultural knowledge as disastrous.

In outlining the strangeness of our cultural activities, Bruner draws our attention not only to the realm of first-time, variational events, to our violations of the normal, but also to the fact that such 'violations' only have their significance against the constitutive background of our normative activities. If we lose our grasp on this background, then anything goes! We will not only lack a shared basis on which to judge the adequacy and relevance of people's claims to knowledge, but we will lose the basis on which we can proclaim ourselves as beings worthy of respect and civility. For us to acquire and retain a grasp of its nature, to achieve insight into our practices of Self, is not easy. To repeat' Instead of a theoretical, explanatory account, we need first to come to a practical understanding of the joint, dialogical nature of our lives together. And if we are to do that, if we are to see the ways in which we 'violate' the norms of our everyday institutions, then we must also violate the norms of our professional institutions. And this is what Bruner has done over and over again, while at the same time always wanting to make amends while still, luckily, not quite being able to prevent himself from yet further violations.

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## Notes

- 1 Bakhtin writes, 'An act of our activity, of our actual experiencing, is like a two-faced Janus. It looks in two opposite directions it looks at the objective domain of culture and at the never-repeatable uniqueness of actually lived and experienced life But there is no unitary and unique plane where both faces would mutually determine each other in relation to a single unity. It is the once-occurrent event of Being in the process of actualization that can constitute this unique unity; all that which is theoretical and aesthetic must be determined as a constituent moment in the once-occurrent event of Being...' (1993: 2)
2. Intertwined into our forms of life are different 'language games' (by this famous term Wittgenstein means 'to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or a form of life' (1953 § 23)) The playful, game-like nature of our forms of talk is most apparent when we are learning, or developing, new language-games. At such times, when meanings are vague, gestures and other more bodily forms of expression are particularly important. We cannot but be spontaneously responsive to the bodily activities of those around us, and are thus always in a living relation to our surroundings. Indeed, such relations constitute the source of all our later, more deliberate activities

We can thus agree with Wittgenstein when he says, "The origin and the primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop. Language - I want to say - is a refinement, "in the beginning was the deed"" (1980: 31).