

LCHC: The Connection from the West

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Building developmental theories to understand human activity in terms of semiotic mediation by culturally produced artifacts, must, evidently, be a collaborative undertaking: a weaving together and transforming of threads from past traditions of cultural psychology, drawing this complex of ideas into contact with present and future reality.

The awareness that the nature of this culturally informed psychology demands a dialogical mode of proceeding characterizes [Alfred Lang](#)'s work to develop a semiotic ecology as well as [Mike Cole](#)'s path to a cultural-historical activity theory. So, although the connection from San Diego, California to Bern, Switzerland was formed in comparatively recent times, the similarities and differences in approach have made for a fruitful interchange between the two scholars and their research groups.

This Transatlantic dialogue has often been carried out through the computer inter-medium of the electronic [xlchc/xmca](#) forum, which in addition to its culture of serious but informal discussions between geographically separate scholars, has the documentary advantage of mail archiving.

The story of "The Connection from the West" is told here by [Mike Cole](#) in an interview made by [Christine Happle](#), and by a contextualized sampling of [Alfred Lang's contributions](#) to the xlists, excerpted and narrated by [Eva Ekeblad](#).

We are all happy to honour Professor Lang in this way.



Mike Cole

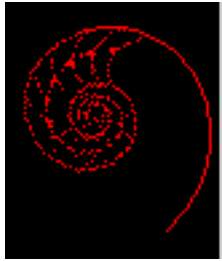


Eva Ekeblad



Christine Happle

* [Hier](#) können Sie klicken um auf verbundene Dokumentstellen zu springen. [Here](#) you can click to jump to related document passages.



Alfred Lang in the xlist multilogue

Compiled for the Alfred Lang Festschrift CD *Extra Lang* on request from Mike Cole by [Eva Ekeblad](#) using material from the XLCHC archives available at <ftp://WEBER.UCSD.EDU/pub/lchc/> and the XMCA Website at <http://communication.ucsd.edu/MCA/index.html>.

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Beginning: the XLCHC

The semiotic environment of a scholar in the second half of the twentieth century includes the possibility of computer mediated communication. By participating on electronic mailinglists international scholars within the same field of research may carry on a multilogue, exchanging "half-baked ideas" with each other over the distances in space and time that separate the events of their meeting in person at conferences and the like. In the case of cultural-historical approaches to psychology (and her sister disciplines) the XLCHC/ /XMCA mailinglists have now served as channels for electronic multilogues and collaborative academic networking for more than a decade.

The original XLCHC mailing list was started by Mike Cole and his colleagues at the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition (LCHC) at the University of California, San Diego in the middle of the 80s (see [Welcome document](#)).

In the spring of 1991 Alfred Lang was introduced to the XLCHC list through his colleague, Urs Fuhrer who had studied in Southern California at UC Irvine (School of Social Ecology) in the late 80s, and had visited the LCHC. Lang and Fuhrer were planning a conference to celebrate the 75th birthday of Ernst Boesch later in the year, to which they invited Mike Cole, who in the ensuing correspondence suggested the XLCHC as a virtual environment of interest to the Bernese Cultural psychologists.

In the second half of May 1991, when Alfred Lang subscribed to the xlchc, the main topic of multiloguing was [play](#) as seen from a psychological perspective, and after about a week of "birdwatching" Lang made his [first contribution](#). To give a rich impression of the xlist context as it presented itself to the newcomer most of the messages in this first "thread" are included here. For later topics the selection from the archived mailstream has often been made more narrowly around the contributions of Alfred Lang, with exceptions for topics where Lang has contributed several turns in the multilogue or where his contributions have evoked many responses. As is the nature of the medium the topics emerging in the xlist forum

are sometimes central to the field, at other times reflections of current events, and occasionally self-reflective responses over the inter-medium itself.

Continuation: Cultural Psychology

As happens with the threads in electronic multilogue they overlap like woolen fibers spun into knitting yarn. So before the last contribution on the psychological meaning of play had been written, a new thread on artifacts had already been started by Mike Cole, who had observed the consternation of students faced with the suggestion that "ideas are **artifacts**." Here Alfred Lang's **reminder** that the challenge is to conceive of artifacts in a non-Cartesian world was taken up by other voices in the multilogue.

In August of 1991 Mike Cole initiates a discussion of the history of the **geological metaphor of layers** in cultural-historical and psychoanalytic ideas about mental development. He raises the question in the course of writing the paper for the Boesch celebration mentioned above, in collaboration with Evgenii Subbotski. Here Alfred Lang **contributes** several long and cautionary messages about the affinity of "layerism" and the Nazi ideology.

As events turned out Mike Cole was unable to attend the celebration conference. The presentation of the joint paper (later published in the Swiss Journal of Psychology) was made by Subbotski. But the discussions continued through the electronic medium.

The remaining three Lang contributions of the year 1991 are 1) a **reminder** of **music** as the purest flow artifact (to a discussion of games); 2) some help on German words for "understandings in advance" to a discussion of **prolepsis** (a recurring xlist theme); 3) a contribution **describing** how apes **do** teach and cooperate to a discussion on **primates** and symbolic thought.

Continuing the multilogue over a culturally informed psychology Arne Raeithel and Mike Cole contribute a couple of XLCHC messages November of 1991, comparing and contrasting non-cartesian varieties of theory, and connecting this to some papers-in-preparation by Alfred Lang. Due to illness Lang is unable to respond in the forum until January of 1992, **but when he does so**, this becomes the starting point of a multilogue on **culture and semiotics**. In part this multilogue relates back to the earlier discussion on primates.

The emerging electronic discussion is also, importantly, a part of the joint interest in developing a culture-inclusive psychology integrating an encompassing theoretical and methodological level with actual phenomena and approaches to practice in the field. For this purpose Lang (in Bern), Cole (in San Diego) and Raeithel (in Hamburg), with the backing of a group of colleagues all over the world, designed a research project named "Acting in Culture". At this point in time the actual face to face meeting of Lang with the other two principal investigators is still in the future. Unfortunately, in spite of proposals being submitted to several

research foundations, the project was never given the means to get off the ground and take flight.

What is presented here as one thread on culture and semiotics, was actually written in two or three bursts of activity in the XLCHC forum. The topic starts in January, and re-surfaces towards the end of March: the joint development of understandings is a long-range undertaking, carried on both in the public forum of the mailinglist and in exchanges by other means between the scholars involved in the project.

In May 1992 Alfred Lang posts two messages referring to the **Brussels XXV**. International Congress of Psychology in July the same year. One of them contains the extended summary for his presentation on ****Semiotic tools for an isomorphic conception of perception and action, mind and culture.**** At this conference Alfred Lang and Mike Cole had the opportunity to meet for the first time in person, and also to spend some hours in discussion with Arne Raeithel and others from the domain of culturally informed psychology.

More multilogue: Kant, Herder, Leont'ev

In the first half of 1993 there are just two short messages from Alfred Lang in the xlist archives. In one of them he suggests that **university students** are also among those categories of human beings that are mythically construed as inadequate and in need of guidance by a firm hand – "What a strange way to hinder the dialogue between generations that is so essential for a living society." In the other message he adds a comment to a rambling discussion in May and June on **scientific concepts** (most of which is not included here).

Nearly a month later (when people come back from summer break) the more philosophical aspects of one of the last messages in the thread on concepts are picked up again. The ensuing multilogue on **Kant**, Edelmann, and the modularity of mind evokes the extended involvement of **Alfred Lang**, who, among other things, brings **Herder** into the discussion.

The multilogical nature of the xlist discussions is nicely expressed by Lang in a message from the 1992 discussion on culture and semiotics:

"As to the spirit of the discussion, I would like everyone taking part to be always aware that something like the cultural-historical approach is like a river in a large delta and which hopefully is incorporating streamlets and streams from other sources and river systems. Making (critical) statements is then like heaping up hills and mountains: they can never stop an existing stream, but perhaps might lead it in other directions and confluences." (A.L. 92-10-01)

So, while Lang on his part was developing a Semiotic Ecology approach, elsewhere in the delta of electronic discussions of 1993 over a culturally informed, cultural-historical psychology and its relations to the activity theory of Leont'ev and other Russian scholars, the complex name Cultural-Historical Activity Theory and its handy acronym CHAT emerged – on the xlists or "backstage": Mike Cole attributes the actual invention to Arne Raeithel, who indeed used to take creative liberties with

the English language in his xlist contributions. Here, in connection to the Activity Theory aspect, is also the right place to mention the name of Yrjö Engeström.

The graduate seminar jointly conducted by Engeström and Cole at UCSD in the fall quarter of 1993 posted its summaries of course readings on the xact list (another xlist family member) under the CHAT label, thus providing the original fuel for the legendary discussion of **goals and motives** in Activity Theory in November 1993, to which Lang made a couple of thought-provoking **contributions**, asking if the concept of goals" might not be ripe for replacement with something more dynamic.

Before the goals discussion, there is an invitation (Oct 31, 1993) by Lang to xlist scholars to contribute to a planned Hamburg symposium on William Stern's work in psychology - bringing together names like **Stern, Cassirer, Peirce, and Vygotsky**. In the end of the year, as the goals discussion tapers to an end, a stray reference reminds Lang of a boyhood reading experience: an **unforgettable** description of a school from the progressive era... whatever its name was???

List developments, 1994-1995

In 1994 the XLCHC underwent a technical restructuring into an automated listserver. This event involved a cancellation of all subscriptions, and as people re-subscribed **English on the Internet** was one of the first topics to emerge in a spirit of list self-reflection and **musings on cultural participation**. Earlier in the year Alfred Lang had contributed some advice to a discussion of how (and whether) to cite **e-mail conversations in published text**, and a **reflection** over an extended discussion on "ADD" and Ritalin.

The themes of cultural participation and community continued to be alive on the XLCHC well into the summer, involving discussions on what the **sharing of objects** (in the sense of activity theory) would mean. Here Lang warns against the **metaphorical** transport of a vocabulary of "sharing" into the realm of ideas. It is, however, in August-September, when the multilogue turns to a critical exploration about notions of **progress** in history, evolution, and human development that Alfred Lang finds occasion for great textual productivity, bringing **Herder** once more into list attention in several messages, written in the days before his departure for The Sixth International Kurt Lewin Conference, which was held at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, September 8-11, 1994. After the conference Alfred Lang had the opportunity to visit Mike Cole at LCHC in San Diego.

In the middle of September 1995 the xlists were re-organized once more, into a single forum instead of a cluster of parallel lists. After being closed over the summer the list was re-named XMCA in order to show the connection to the journal Mind, Culture, and Activity. The change also included a new subscription procedure, which demanded a self-description from each new subscriber. So we can see that Alfred Lang **re-joined** the forum on October 8.

One of the topics attended to briefly in the first weeks of XMCA activity was the old favourite theme of **tools** as mediating artifacts, to which **Lang** adds an observation

on how the substantive character of mediators must not be allowed to obscure the generative character of the semiotic relation.

Closing in on the present

In January 1996 there is another cycle of multiloguing over the relation between **semiotic** (Peirce) and cultural-historical psychology (Vygotsky). To this discussion Alfred Lang posts a long excerpt from his paper "Toward a mutual interplay between psychology and semiotics" (JALT 19(1) 45-66), **prefaced** by an orientation distinguishing between four different types of semiotic.

The next XMCA episode to which Lang **contributes** is also a re-cycling theme: collective self-reflection over the use of **English** as a common Internet language.

Then, in May, the viability of the idea of **Dialectics** is taken as the object of a multilogue to which Arne Raeithel contributes some disillusion concerning Engels, while Yrjö Engeström, Vera John-Steiner and others take less pessimistic approaches. Alfred Lang in **his turn** suggests the replacement of Dialectics with Dialogics.

In September there is an interesting little conversation from the history of psychology between Ana Marjanovic-Shane, Boris Gindis, **Alfred Lang** (and others), about the contacts between **Lewin and Vygotsky**, and about the role of Bluma Zeigarnik in this context.

In December the XMCA is shaken by the **sad news from Hamburg** of the sudden and untimely death of Arne Raeithel. For a time the multilogue took on a character of collective mourning, but only a few messages from those heart-wringing days are included here. For Alfred Lang this event coincided in time with the celebration of **Ernst Boesch's** 80th birthday.

This brings us close to the present time. The most recent two **messages by Alfred Lang** to be included here are contributions to a thread on **materiality/ideality**, where XMCA participants are grappling with the philosophy of Il'enkov. Lang argues that rather than trying to re-unite the material and the ideal it would be more appropriate never to have separated them. Problems of dualism should be dissolved, rather than solved – which stands properly here as a final word.

On line the multilogue continues.

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Xlist messages from Alfred Lang

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1. Play

1.23 Tue, 28 May **1991** 19:39:55 [play re-constructed](#)

2. Artifacts

2.6 Tue, 4 Jun **1991** 09:17:29 [artifacts](#)

3. Layerism

3.3 Tue, 13 Aug **1991** 12:31:50 [re: geological metaphor \(layers, Schichtenlehre\)](#)
3.16 Mon, 19 Aug **1991** 14:24:43 [130 lines of layerophobic agent](#)
3.19 Fri, 23 Aug **1991** 14:57:19 [More archeology of layerism \(120 lines\)](#)
3.20 Fri, 23 Aug **1991** 15:05:03 [More archeology of layerism](#)
3.21 Fri, 23 Aug **1991** 15:09:14 [last 3 paragr. to archeology](#)
3.30 Wed, 28 Aug **1991** 12:26:24 [scaffolding, layers, etc. 60 lines](#)

4. Some music

4.2 Thu, 22 Aug **1991** 17:48:00 [D&D, flow, music](#)

5. Prolepsis

5.3 Wed, 28 Aug **1991** 19:45:10 [Prolepsis - Vorverstaendnis](#)

6. Primates

6.7 Tue, 15 Oct **1991** 11:38:52 [Apes do teach and cooperate!](#)

7. Culture and semiotics

7.3 Thu, 9 Jan **1992** 13:39:25 [Non-Cartesian Vyg? \(290 lines!\)](#)
7.6 Fri, 10 Jan **1992** 12:28:33 [Culture and Semiotics](#)
7.11 Mon, 13 Jan **1992** 11:42:32 [Nature/Culture and Mediation \(100 lines\)](#)

- 7.31 Tue, 21 Apr **1992** 17:02:50 [Mediation: meaning, context...](#)
- 8. Brussels congress**
- 8.1 Sun, 24 May **1992** 12:51:23 [Brussels Intl. Congress](#)
- 8.2 Sun, 24 May **1992** 12:53:57 [Brussels Long Summary \(130 lines\)](#)
- 9. Younger humans**
- 9.1 Sat, 27 Feb **1993** 11:43:15 [Re: Younger humans](#)
- 10. Scientific concepts**
- 10.5 Mon, 07 Jun **1993** 18:55:54 [FWD: scientific concepts](#)
- 11. Kant**
- 11.6 Tue, 27 Jul **1993** 09:00:39 [Re: Kant](#)
- 11.15 Mon, 02 Aug **1993** 16:01:51 [re: Kant and Herder, rather than Hegel](#)
- 11.16 Tue, 03 Aug **1993** 18:02:25 [List on Social Semiotics](#)
- 11.22 Thu, 05 Aug **1993** 09:56:32 [Re: Agatti on Categories](#)
- 11.27 Sat, 07 Aug **1993** 12:53:38 [RE: Kant again...](#)
- 11.31 Mon, 09 Aug **1993** 21:00:58 [RE: Kant and we](#)
- 11.36 Thu, 12 Aug **1993** 11:21:59 [Re: brain limitations](#)
- 11.38 Fri, 13 Aug **1993** 18:52:01 [Kant, Herder and wishful thinking](#)
- 11.39 Fri, 13 Aug **1993** 18:56:27 [Edelman etc.](#)
- 12. Hamburg symposium**
- 12.1 Sun, 31 Oct **1993** 20:46:52 [Call for contributions: Stern, Cassirer, Peirce, Vygotsky.](#)
- 13. Goals**
- 13.7 Wed, 03 Nov **1993** 17:53:07 [Notions of goal and strategy etc.](#)
- 13.10 Thu, 04 Nov **1993** 21:18:40 [Goal notions](#)
- 13.40 Tue, 9 Nov **1993** 08:46:38 [Goal-Talk and beyond](#)
- 13.41 Tue, 9 Nov **1993** 22:11:12 [Re: confusion over goals/objects](#)

14. An unforgettable school

- 14.1 Fri, 26 Nov **1993** 09:10:36 Re: REQUEST for references
14.2 Wed, 8 Dec **1993** 10:48:24 Re: Reference on workshop school
14.3 Wed, 15 Dec **1993** 23:30:04 Re: Schools from the "progressive" era

15. ADD and Ritalin

- 15.1 Thu, 3 Mar **1994** 12:30:14 The drugs, or on the dozed and the kickers

16. Email citations

- 16.10 Wed, 13 Apr **1994** 10:26:27 Re: Quoting xfamily messages

17. English on the Internet

- 17.6 Wed, 11 May **1994** 17:39:48 Re: lingua franca and the "new" xlhc medium
17.8 Thu, 12 May **1994** 17:45:08 Re: Guesting it
17.9 Sat, 14 May **1994** 17:58:41 AL# Re: culture

18. Shared objects

- 18.5 Sun, 26 Jun **1994** 22:17:15 Re: Shared objects
18.7 Mon, 27 Jun **1994** 13:50:31 AL# Re: on sharing

19. Progress?

- 19.17 Sat, 3 Sep **1994** 20:52:29 More on progress and scripts
19.18 Sat, 3 Sep **1994** 20:52:38 Re: Post-relativism
19.22 Sun, 4 Sep **1994** 17:08:35 Re: concern for truth
19.26 Mon, 5 Sep **1994** 10:55:15 Progress etc. -- Herder
19.27 Mon, 5 Sep **1994** 11:21:26 Re: Progress etc.
19.29 Tue, 6 Sep **1994** 16:52:45 Re: Progress etc. -- Herder
19.32 Wed, 21 Sep **1994** 18:36:20 Search for J.G. Herder related addresses (English-language world)
19.34 Thu, 13 Oct **1994** 17:53:16 Re: Cross cultural communication

20. Re-subscribing

- 20.1 Sun, 8 Oct **1995** 12:23:20 lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)

21. Tools

- 21.3 Mon, 9 Oct **1995** 13:48:46 [Re: Tools](#)
21.5 Tue, 10 Oct **1995** 22:57:32 [Re: Tools, mediative relations](#)

22. Types of semiotic

- 22.3 Mon, 29 Jan **1996** 09:03:32 [Vygotsky's and Peirce's Semiotic](#)
22.4 Mon, 29 Jan **1996** 09:06:08 [On types of semiotic \(1300+ words\)](#)

23. English on the Internet

- 23.14 Wed, 17 Apr **1996** 14:46:34 [Re: English on the internet](#)

24. Dialectics

- 24.17 Tue, 14 May **1996** 12:08:20 [Re: Dialectics and CHAT](#)

25. Zeigarnik

- 25.10 Sat, 31 Aug **1996** 08:26:02 [Re: Does anyone know...?](#)
25.13 Mon, 2 Sep **1996** 09:03:14 [Re: Does anyone know...?](#)
25.16 Wed, 4 Sep **1996** 14:19:40 [Re: Does anyone know...? Lewin-Vygotsky-Zeigarnik](#)
25.21 Mon, 9 Sep **1996** 08:57:19 [Re: Does anyone know...? Lewin-Vygotsky-Zeigarnik](#)
25.22 Mon, 9 Sep **1996** 16:41:44 [Re: Does anyone know...? Lewin-Vygotsky-Zeigarnik](#)

26. Arne Raeithel

- 26.4 Thu, 5 Dec **1996** 08:34:24 [Arne](#)
26.6 Thu, 12 Dec **1996** 16:41:24 [Arne's funeral is today](#)

27. Ernst Boesch

- 27.2 Tue, 10 Dec **1996** 09:41:06 [Re: Ernst Boesch! \(reference\)](#)
27.3 Wed, 8 Jan **1997** 09:03:56 [Ernst E. Boesch to his 80th Birthday](#)

28. Material/ /ideal

- 28.5 Mon, 27 Jan **1997** 14:05:28 [Re: floor hockey and Marx, material and ideal](#)

28.7 Wed, 29 Jan **1997** 11:49:00

Re:[material/ideal] from
P.E.Jones@shu.ac.uk

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1. Play 1991: 1 / 30

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1.1. Date: Mon, 20 May 91 11:27:13 PDT

From: lillard%psych@Forsythe.Stanford.EDU (Angeline Lillard)
Subject: Pretend play
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Does anyone have thoughts/suggested readings on the issue of why children engage in pretend play, and why they stop?

Are there cultures that differ from our's in their attitudes towards pretend play, and are there cultures in which children do not engage in pretend play, or are at least discouraged from it?

Many thanks,

Angeline Lillard
lillard@psych.stanford.edu

1.2. Date: Mon, 20 May 91 19:25 MST

From: YGOODMAN@ARIZRVAX.BITNET
Subject: re play
To: xlchc@UCSD.BITNET

Clem Edelman in England did a recent book and some earlier work on play. Pat Carini and Vivian Paley in the US have written on it. Some of the writing on early narrative- Harold and Betty Rosen in England, Arthur Appleby I think suggests that children create narratives and act out scenarios at early ages. Bruner has been writing a lot on narrative lately. Why do you ask, Angeline, why they stop. What makes you think they do?

Ken Goodman (with help from Yetta Goodman)

1.3. Date: Thu, 23 May 1991 11:49 EST

From: FISHBEIN@UCBEH.BITNET
Subject: Pretend play, Piaget, and dreams
To: xlchc@UCSD.BITNET

I'm sorry I forgot who asked about the reasons pretend play decrease with age (if it does), but Piaget in his book Play, Dreams, and Imitation attempts to give an

answer to this question. It's too long to briefly summarize, when you include all his technical terms, but his discussion is well worth reading. As a relevant aside, I've "always known" that the word "dreams" was in the title of the book, but never gave it any thought until this quarter where I am using the book as part of a research methods course for our Psychology majors. The section on dreams is fascinating. I had vaguely known that Piaget had some involvement with Freud and psychoanalysis, but in this book he gives a sympathetic rendering of dreams and symbolic thought, and of course tells the reader a simpler way to understand important aspects of psychoanalysis than Freud and his followers presented. Also importantly Piaget gives a pretty good treatment of the role of affect in development. He talks about affective schemas and their development, and the fit with psychoanalytic thought. It's well worth-while reading this relatively short chapter.

Harold D. Fishbein

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Cincinnati, Ohio 45221 Fishbein@ucbeh.san.uc.edu

1.4. Date: Thu, 23 May 91 09:15:37 PDT

From: cole@casbs.Stanford.EDU (Michael Cole)

Subject: pretending

To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Hal-

I think the focus of the question on pretend play was about cultural variations. This is a topic I am puzzled about too. I recall hearing at a meeting at the Psychosocial Center in Chicago a few years ago about evidence of the absence of pretend play in some cultures. If true, such a finding would raise some tough questions for Vygotsky's analysis of the role of play in cognitive development, and perhaps Piaget's as well.

What is the evidence, or lack thereof, of the universality of pretend play??

About Piaget and Freud. A big topic. Hans Furth has written a book on this topic, the title of which escapes me except that desire is in the title as I recall. And, of course, a key point in Vygotsky's criticism of Piaget in *Thought and Speech* was that Piaget was siding with Freud (according to LSV) in assuming an initial autistic state of the newborn which gradually became socialized. mike

Michael Cole

Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences

202 Junipero Serra Blvd.

Stanford, California 94305

cole@casbs.Stanford.edu

1.5. Date: Thu, 23 May 91 18:40:51 +0200

From: jgrudin@daimi.aau.dk
Subject: Re: pretending
To: cole@casbs.Stanford.EDU, xlchc@ucsd.edu

On the universality of play...

I lived one year next to the San Diego zoo and spent occasional afternoons lazily watching the inmates. Not all of the mammals seemed to be playing now and then, but a lot did, and not just primates. Of course, they didn't have a lot of work to do.

Somewhat suspect as a data point, perhaps, but the kid playing under the adverse conditions depicted in Nanook of the North suggested it would be hard to discourage it. And it could always retreat to guarded corners of the mind...

Jonathan

1.6. Date: Thu, 23 May 91 17:20 EDT

From: ELLICE@vms.cis.pitt.edu
Subject: more about pretend play
To: xlchc@ucsd.EDU

Piaget made an important distinction between three different types of play: practice play, symbolic play, games with rules. He claimed that the first type was associated with infancy, the second with the preoperational period, and the third with the concrete operational stage. If the original question was about the cultural universality of pretend play, then one needs to ask about all three types of play. Nonhuman primates clearly engage in practice play--as do other mammals like cats and dogs. It is very difficult if not impossible to define symbolic play in the absence of language (or at least some sort of semiotic system such as symbolic gestures). Thus, it would be difficult to argue that nonhuman primates engage in symbolic play. I don't know if anyone has tried to argue that great apes or monkeys engage in symbolic play. Do you know Mike? This issue could also relate to the continuity/discontinuity question as well.

Ellice Forman

Dept of Psychology in Education

University of Pittsburgh

ellice@pittvms

1.7. Date: Thu, 23 May 91 15:01:39 PDT

From: cole@casbs.Stanford.EDU (Michael Cole)
Subject: pretend
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

I'll let Mike Tomasello or someone more knowledgeable answer the question about symbolic play in apes, Ellice. But you add one datum that I think sharpens up the issue of cultural universality of symbolic play. To my mind the notion of a "pre-operational" STAGE is highly suspect on lots of grounds. In fact, Piaget also wonders somewhere in his writings if it is a stage or a transition. It sure seems to need some sort of institutionalization as a distinctive period to exist as such, e.g., it is not a universal "stage." (In fact, there are interesting cultural variabilities in the culturally defined stages that cut up the period from birth to puberty which slice the so-called pre-school/pre-operational categories into lots of different segments).

Now, symbolic play is associated in Industrialized countries with pre-school and pre-operational. What if it were the case that a culture neither recognized such a period nor evidenced symbolic play. What implications would that have for theories of cognitive development. A recent Amer Anthr (1989, vol 91, p405) has periods in what we would call infancy and early childhood that go 0-6months (when crawling begins) 6mo--5/6 years when child spends "most of time playing, but begins helping by carrying water, watching younger children," etc.). Is that play symbolic or ..??

So, the question of whether symbolic play arises *pari parsu* with the semiotic function (or the fusion of cultural and natural lines--choose your theorist) remains an intriguing one. and so far, no one on xlchc is venturing any data. Maybe we are collectively ignorant on this question.

mike

1.8. Date: Thu, 23 May 91 17:12 EDT

From: ELLICE@vms.cis.pitt.edu
Subject: pretend play
To: xlchc@ucsd.EDU

There was a session at SRCD entitled cultural dimensions of pretend play (Thurs 12:30-2:20). Presenters included Peggy Miller, Catherine Garvey, and Artin Goncu. I would guess that any of them (or the other presenters) would have much to say on the topic of cultural differences in pretense. I would also guess that the work that Mike Cole heard about at the Center for Psychosocial Studies was work done by Suzanne Gaskins on play among the Mayan Indian children. Suzanne also gave a paper at SRCD.

Ellice Forman

Dept of Psychology in Education
Univ of Pittsburgh Pittsburgh, PA 15260
ellice@pittvms

1.9. Date: Thu, 23 May 91 19:05 EDT

From: (Jim Youniss)
Subject: Furth's book
To: xlchc@ucsd

The book by Hans Furth is: "Knowledge as Desire." Columbia University Press. By the way, if anyone is in Philadelphia on May 30, we are holding a symposium in honor of Hans Furth. 6 pm at the Piaget Society meetings, Holiday Inn, downtown.

Youniss@cua

1.10. Date: 24 May 1991 0946-PDT (Friday)

From: chalverson@UCSD.EDU (Christine Halverson [krys])
Subject: animal play
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Some good examples of baboon play are in Shirley Strum's book Almost Human which charts her extensive observation of a troop in Kenya.

Christine Halverson

1.11. Date: Fri, 24 May 1991 12:50 EST

From: FISHBEIN@UCBEH.BitNet
Subject: symbolic play
To: xlchc@ucsd.bitnet

Ellice, In that same book, Play, Dreams , and Imitation, Piaget maintains, following Kohler, that chimpanzees engage in symbolic play. Regarding the need of language to establish the existence of symbolic, in that same book Piaget gives a lot of examples of symbolic play that do not involve language. It's really a terrific book which should be widely read by developmental psychologists.

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1.12. Date: Fri, 24 May 91 14:56:55 EDT

From: psymt@emoryu1.cc.emory.edu (Mike Tomasello)
Subject: pretend play in apes
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Although there have been some reports of chimpanzees raised in a human-like cultural environment engaging in some symbolic play (Hayes, Svage- Rumbaugh), in my fairly extensive hours of watching chimpanzees in a semi-natural environment I have not seen anything I would call pretend. I personally do not consider Bateson's analysis of play as automatically pretense - even in the rough and tumble variety - to be valid. Sue Svage-Rumbaugh says that even with Kanzi - the "language" using bonobo (pygmy chimpanzee) pretense is very uncommon.

Mike Tomasello

1.13. Date: Fri, 24 May 91 11:28:14 pdt

From: bhazlehurst@UCSD.EDU (Brian Hazlehurst)
Subject: symbols and play
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

G. Bateson (in collected papers entitled *Steps Toward an Ecology of Mind*) interprets some observations of wolf behavior to be symbolic in the following way:

When a dominant male "catches" a subordinate male in the act of copulation, the former rushes over and (with mouth open) repeatedly pushes the latter's head down to the ground. Bateson argues that the source of this behavior can not simply be a stimulus-response mechanism since the effect ("don't do that") is not achieved directly by the action (i.e., much more physical intervention would be more directly effective and quite easily accomplished--the junior male is really at the mercy of the dominant male in this circumstance).

Rather, Bateson says, the *means* for achieving the effect ("don't do that") are located in the established (social) dominance hierarchy and the behavior is symbolic because it communicates the abstract concomitants of the relationship between the two ("you puppy, how dare you"). This is related to play because it is precisely the same behaviors encountered and practiced in the "rough-housing" of puppies.

Brian Hazlehurst
Depts of Anth and Cog Sci

1.14. Date: Fri, 24 May 91 20:09 EDT

From: ELLICE@pittvms
Subject: symbolic play

To: xlchc@UCSD.BITNET

Mike, I would never refer to the preoperational STAGE--I know Piaget too well for that. I believe I mentioned the preoperational period. I no longer pay too much attention to these stages anymore but I think the distinctions between types of play are important. When Vygotsky wrote about play, he clearly had symbolic play in mind. Defining play is difficult because almost anything could count as play and not as play (e.g., digging a ditch, playing a game). Defining symbolic play is even more difficult because in addition to its voluntary, pleasurable, means over ends qualities, you also have to show that there is a recognition of the "as if" quality. For example, when a two year old plays at sweeping, she depends upon a broom in her play. When a four year old plays at sweeping, she can use anything or nothing in her play because she can mark it as play with gestures and/or language.

I am glad that Harold Fishbein reminded me that Piaget mentioned chimpanzee play in his book (which I have read a number of times but not recently). I would like to know how he was able to define symbolic play without language or obvious use of symbolic gestures.

Ellice Forman
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1.15. Date: Sat, 25 May 91 17:19:20 +0200

From: jgrudin@daimi.aau.dk
Subject: Re: more about pretend play
To: ELLICE@vms.cis.pitt.edu, xlchc@ucsd.EDU

How difficult would it be to briefly summarize the distinctions among practice, symbolic, and rule-based play?

We are working with definitions whereby when two dogs who get along fine suddenly play as though adversaries, growling, barking, and wrestling, one is not a symbolic adversary and the restraint that biting doesn't break the skin is not a rule; similarly when a kitten spontaneously bats a crumpled piece of paper around for a few minutes, long after recognizing that it is inedible, that object is not symbolic of prey. Are conscious thought processes required for symbolic play and rule-based games? That could do it. The discussion seems to face terminological as well as conceptual hurdles.

-- Jonathan UCSD

1.16. Date: Sun, 26 May 91 13:53 EDT

From: ELLICE@vms.cis.pitt.edu
Subject: definition of play
To: xlchc@ucsd.EDU

Jonathan asked for definitions of practice play, symbolic play, and rule-based games. I'm no expert on play but Piaget's book on play (Play, dreams, and imitation in childhood) which Harold mentioned earlier is a good source of these various definitions also work by Catherine Garvey, Brian Sutton-Smith and Vygotsky's article on play (in *Mind in Society* and elsewhere). Bruner edited a volume on play several years ago which has a number of relevant articles--including play in other animals.

In Bill Damon's textbook (1983) on social and personality development, he summarizes a number of play markers that have been used to identify children's play: pleasurable, creative and nonliteral, free from affective distress, spontaneous and self-initiated, repetition or elaboration of behavior already acquired, no principally governed by the pursuit of external goals. The nonliteral part of the definition would distinguish symbolic play from practice play for me. I guess that to be nonliteral, you would have to be conscious of the difference between actually doing something (drinking tea) and playing at doing it. Symbolic play is obviously rule-governed but it is different from games with rules in that all game players need to share a common set of rules and abide by them. In symbolic play, the rules are more flexible and while they're shared to some extent, there is less need for everyone to agree upon them and follow them.

One distinction that is implicit in Vygotsky's writings about play but I think is consistent with his other work is that the transition between practice play and symbolic play entails a reorganization of motivations for playing. In practice play, the child enjoys the activity for its own sake. In symbolic play, the child enjoys the meaning of the activity. That is, when a toddler plays at sweeping the floor, he enjoys the activity of sweeping. When a preschooler plays at sweeping the floor, she enjoys the activity of pretending to sweep the floor.

I'm not sure how this applies to your examples of dogs and cats at play. However, those activities seem pleasurable, free from distress, spontaneous, means rather than ends governed--but not nonliteral to me. Thus, I would agree that they resemble practice play more than symbolic play.

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1.17. Date: Mon, 27 May 91 16:05 +2

From: HAKKARAINEN@JYLK.JYU.FI
Subject: Mail from HAKKARAINEN@FINJYU.BITNET, HAKKARAINEN@JYLK.jyu.fi (U
of Jyväskylä)
To: xlchc@UCSD.EDU

PLAY, PRETEND AND SYMBOLIC

Discussion around the concept of play has been interesting I am not a specialist in play research, so I am not used to definitions given so far. The criteria given by Ellice Forman result in innumerable descriptions to the question what is play. One possibility to change the situation would be to use general activity approach to the definition of play. This implies that there is a specific object of different types of play (and motivation as Vygotski writes) First problem, I guess, will be the fact that play is a pleasurable phenomenon which has no aims or goals. Is it possible that there is a specific object of an activity without conscious goals? I think Elkonin has made an attempt to discern different types of play by using the object of activity as a criterium. On the basis of this rationale we should ask is the motivation of pretend play different from the motivation of symbolic play or role play?

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1.18. Date: Mon, 27 May 1991 13:42:06 EDT

From: Joe Glick
Subject: play? work?
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

I like the attempt to move the issue of play from a Piagetian framework to a more activity theory related one. In the Piagetian formulation, with all of its distinctions, Play begins to take on a thing-like character and then we ask questions like "where is that thing? in monkeys? all over the world?, etc."

Play exists in several forms - as a social "tag" for activities taken on by actors - "we are playing". In this guise we would want to know first, what is meant by "we are playing" and second the discursive rules and cultural conditions that allow such statements to be made - and by whom?

It also exists as an analyst's categorization of some stretch of behavior no matter what the participants might or might not say about it. The Piagetian approach is in terms of the analyst's categories.

To a player play may have goals, etc.. Ask a gambler what his gambling is about - ask a Balinese what "Deep Play" is about? Ask a kid?

The analyst's category of play is most likely to be the accompaniment of a theoretical enterprise that looks for cognitive construction or deep markings of the differences between play and work.

We would want to be able to - at least - keep the questions straight since very different issues are involved. Play is one of those developmental terms that tends to mush distinctions between the actor and the observer - and as such it becomes a term which is clearly loaded theoretically but which poses as a more or less naturalistic descriptive term.

Many of the issues in the great "continuity-discontinuity" discussion may have this characteristic.

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1.19. Date: Mon, 27 May 91 16:18:29 pdt

From: anicolopoulou@UCSD.EDU (Ageliki Nicolopoulou)
Subject: pretense play
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

I. First, I would like to clarify one issue that has been raised in the discussion about pretense play.

Hal Fishbein has mentioned that Piaget claims in his book "Play, Dreams, and Imitation" that chimpanzees engage in "symbolic play," but I would say that Piaget's claim is much weaker. What he says is that we can interpret Kohler's data as showing that chimpanzees engage in PRETENSE play. This is not quite the same thing.

The point is that Piaget draws a distinction between pretense play and symbolic play. This is not a very sharp distinction, but it is one that is important to him for the theoretical argument of the book, which is to show that the emergence of "the symbolic function (itself considered as a mechanism common to the various systems of representations) is an individual mechanism whose existence is a

prerequisite for interaction of thought between individuals and consequently for the constitution or acquisition of collective meanings."

Crudely speaking, for Piaget pretend play is one of make-believe without symbols, something close to direct IMITATION (Piaget speaks of it as "deferred imitation"). For Piaget, this is not yet the same thing as symbolization. Symbolic play involves make-believe with the use of genuine symbols (which, for Piaget, are not yet "signs").

II. Now, to the more substantive issues/questions. This discussion started with someone from Stanford asking, among other things, why symbolic play decreases with age. If I remember correctly, this question was (partly) restated by Mike Cole who thought that it would be important to identify whether there are cultures where we don't observe symbolic play among young children--and that this kind of evidence would cause trouble and difficulty for both Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories on play. To Mike's inquiry Ellice Forman added that this kind of evidence (lack of symbolic play) would be crucial to clarify issues of continuity and discontinuity in development. (I should apologize if I have misrepresented this discussion or misquoted people, but I'm reconstructing all this from memory as I was trying very hard not to get sucked into this discussion. To no avail!)

This set of exchanges touch on a number of issues, but, I think, we might want to start by slightly restating or refining the questions, since I think the way they have been advanced so far may mislead us (in part because I think they rest on some shared assumptions--explicit and implicit--that are problematic). It seems to me that:

<1> We want to be clear about what we're looking for, and why. Pretend play, as either Piaget or Vygotsky conceives of it, is only one form of a more general phenomenon, symbolic play. We should be looking, not simply for the presence or absence (or amount) of pretend play, but for variations in the FORMS of symbolic play.

<2> Pretend play (or symbolic play more generally) is important for Piaget and Vygotsky not just for its own sake, but primarily because they think it expresses certain important underlying psychological functions or capacities (more on this later). If there turn out to be significant variations (cultural or otherwise) in the frequency of pretend play, this would not by itself pose great problems for either of their arguments. What WOULD be damaging would be to show that the underlying psychological functions or capacities they postulate are not present. But, as I'll suggest in a moment, I think this is unlikely to happen.

<3> However, in order to make sense of these variations (and other phenomena), it will be necessary to slightly refocus the understanding of symbolic play (including pretend play) explicitly advanced by the two theorists. It seems to me that both of them tend to conceive of symbolic play--or, more specifically, pretend play--as a

more or less direct expression of a specific underlying psychological process or function. (And this implicit assumption also underlies, I would say, most of the questions and comments offered so far in the network exchange.) Instead, I would say, we need to see each form of symbolic play as expressing a specific UNION between a psychological process and a cultural form. If we use this conception as a starting-point, we will frame our questions about symbolic play differently.

I would suggest that it is consistent with the overall logic of Vygotsky's theoretical project to conceive of symbolic play in this way-- i.e., as the union of a psychological process with a cultural form--even though Vygotsky doesn't precisely talk about it this way explicitly. And this reformulation would affect how we might INTERPRET any data regarding age and/or cultural variations in symbolic play. I would say that both Vygotsky and Piaget (in their works on play) were trying to identify--in different ways--what are the (universal) psychological processes or functions that provide the major impetus for pretense or symbolic play among young children. It is these underlying psychological processes that they're most concerned about; and what would be most damaging to their arguments would be to show the absence of these underlying functions or processes. But, if we accept the reformulated conception of symbolic play I've just advanced, then possible cultural or age variations in play activity cannot unequivocally be interpreted as showing the lack of the major psychological functions that (in different ways) Piaget and Vygotsky have postulated. (That is, such evidence, by itself, is likely to be tangential to their central explicit arguments--not decisive one way or another.)

Crudely speaking: In the case of Vygotsky, he postulates that the major impetus and requirement for symbolic play is the ability of the child to engage in fantasy (i.e., the ability to postpone immediate gratification and to engage in fulfillment of "generalized" unrealizable desires), which in turn he sees as closely tied to the symbolic function. In the case of Piaget, he postulates that the ability to "re-present" or, more precisely, the emergence of the symbolic function is important; and he then elaborates the ways that the symbolic function operates according to the set of symbolic psychological processes or mechanisms identified by Freud (e.g., wish-fulfillment, compensation, identification, projection, etc.).

We can have a lot of debate over how well or successfully they've identified and delineated these psychological processes. But what I would add is that the ways that these underlying psychological processes are EXPRESSED in play activity (or other activity) does not depend only on the underlying psychological processes themselves. They will be shaped by the INTERPLAY of psychological processes and the available (and predominant) cultural forms. Therefore--to reiterate--the absence of specific forms of activity is not, in itself, decisive evidence for the absence of the postulated psychological process (and would thus not necessarily be damaging to the core of either theory). And, frankly, I would be hard pressed to think of the kinds of data that would lead me to infer that children in certain cultures lacked either the ability to represent and/or the ability to fantasize!

Furthermore, based on the conception I'm advancing, we might re- think the question of whether (and why) pretense play declines with age. (Having attended a certain number of faculty meetings and professional conventions, I'm not sure it does!) It seems to me that we are likely to find that what's involved is a gradual shift in the predominant FORMS of symbolic play at different age levels. (One of the key limitations of much psychological research on play is to assume that only children play; whereas our real subject ought to be, as Huizinga puts it, "the play element in culture" more generally.) Speculatively, I would look for explanations of age-related shifts in two main areas: (a) the range of available, age-appropriate cultural forms for symbolic play in particular cultures; and (b) if there is a gradual decrease in pretense play with age, perhaps we can make sense of it by drawing on Vygotsky's general picture of the trend that psychological functions take: from overt (interpsychological) to covert (intrapsychological). Symbolic play among young children is definitely an overt/interpsychological expression (coupled with particular cultural forms of symbolic play that are likely to vary from one culture to another). With time, we begin to engage in covert fantasizing--reading novels, seeing movies, watching plays. And, some of us might even engage in genuine enactments. Maybe symbolic play increases (rather than decreases) with age!

Ageliki Nicolopoulou
U. of California/San Diego

1.20. Date: Tue, 28 May 91 13:18:58 +0100

From: Phil Agre
Subject: pretense play
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Ageliki Nicolopoulou's terrific message rightly points at the quite enormous system of reifications that tends to lurk behind phrases like 'play decreases with age'. One might consider extending her analysis further by looking at cultural stagings of activity, in terms of (1) the sorts of activities deemed normal for such-and-such culturally constituted sorts of individuals (e.g., who can play? -- 'age' as such may or may not be something a given culture bothers constructing or caring about), (2) the cultural constructions of appropriateness of activities in relation to the 'context' (e.g., when can you play?), and (3) socialization of individuals into such-and-such culturally constituted roles (learning how to play -- Peggy Miller is doing interesting new work on this). Putting things this way makes obvious the dangers of hypostatizing a category of 'play' across cultures and social positions. It also completely changes the question of how one would go about *looking for* 'play'. We might take Ageliki's example of professional conventions, where the 'play' that occurs is definitely a relative matter, since the whole scene is thick with issues of power and propriety. (Watch closely in a group of rowdy, drinking professors when someone makes a joke that steps just a little over the line, so as to be interpretable as insulting someone's work.) Another example would be lovers' play, which is (in our own culture anyway) often full of so-called regression: baby talk, silliness,

stuffed animals. And so forth. Each activity has its own 'logic' in which cultural forms organize the performance of certain social relations. That's quite a crude formulation, but it does serve to point out the special value of analyzing play: what sort of social 'logic', indeed what sort of 'explanation' at all, can make sense of 'play' without reducing it to some sort of calculus?

Phil Agre
University of Sussex

1.21. Date: Tue, 28 May 91 15:49 MET

From: MORTENSEN@vax.psl.ku.dk
Subject: Inger Bernth: On play and imagination.
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Piaget and Vygotsky (and Freud and many others) share the 19. cent. world view, where play and fantasy represent a less developed stage than logical reason (myth lower than science, regression in the service of creativity etc.etc.). So when you find rational thought in children you don't look for development of imagination because imagination is considered a step on the ladder to rationality. But play worlds and imaginary worlds may develop simultaneously with logical thought, not just be a lower stage in cognition. I agree with Franklin and with a little trouble have found several examples, I suspect we shall find many if we look for them. Margery Franklin: Play as the creation of imaginary situations, in: B. Kaplan & S. Wapner (eds.): Towards a holistic developmental psychology, 1983.

1.22. Date: Tue, 28 May 1991 12:18:52 PDT

From: Chuck Goodwin
Subject: Pretense Play
To: xlchc%ucsd.bitnet@cunyvm.cuny.edu

Describing a strip of behavior as "play" can be a heavily loaded political act, for participants as well as analysts. In a lecture in the mid 60's Harvey Sacks focused on a description of a child who was said to "play" at being coquettish. By formulating the description in this way its speaker proposed an organization of the world such that the child could not in fact be engaging in "real" flirtatious behavior. Sacks compared this to situations in the pre civil war American south, when the child of a master and the child of a slave would be raised together as companions, receiving the same education and experience. As young adults if these two people wore the same clothes or engaged in exactly the same behavior, the black (but not the white man) would be said to be "playing" at being the master. Implicit in the description are strong claims about who owns not only the plantation (and gender), but also reality, i.e. the "natural" perception of what kinds of events actions count as. In such circumstances describing a strip of behavior as "play" is a deeply

loaded act, situated within the cultural system of a particular polical structure that it helps to re-enforce and reproduce.

1.23. Date: Tue, 28 May 1991 19:39:55 +0000

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From: Alfred Lang
Subject: play re-constructed
To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet

I am new to xlchc, find one week's bird-watching great and shall try to enter into exchanges of various sorts. Here is a first sample.

To the discussion on (pretend) play I should like to add that it is probably impossible to give a categorical definition on the empirical level (am I playing or working right now? and you, when you read?) and possibly misleading to give an empirical definition in terms of a prototype (one might overlook important cases and also generalize from special cases), although you need both to do research. But keep any definition provisional, revisable, I might suggest. I for one would prefer to start from a structural conception and then would like to see what concrete activity in what kind of situations would be in line with a good construct. One potential of this top-down procedure might be that any manifestation of such a construct could be either in overt behavior (interpersonal, social or with oneself) or inside (intrapersonal, fantasy and the like). We split that too readily in two completely different worlds, I think. Look out for the construct to show something we have overlooked or something we have seen in simplistic terms.

The structural conception or construct I think of is most easily illustrated by Kurt Lewins "irreality layer" idea (e.g. in the Field Theory book 1951 in the 1946 chapter on "Behavior and Development as a function of the total situation"; but don't get caught with the unreal, fantasies are very real, indeed).

More generally, I think the essence of play to be control reduplication. In other words, play is an activity that is governed by (at least) two relatively independent control systems that work simultaneously although they are partially different or even contradictory; that can get along together, although there are some discrepancies if not incompatibilities among them. Duplication does not mean identity, but rather partial congruence and partial discrepancy.

Lets check some common examples of play in the light of that notion. (a) Role play and (b) rule play obviously fit:

(a) An actor (professional or child) is or behaves as simultaneously herself as well as the role. And the two must have lots in common and something discrepant. Usually it's bad acting, not even funny, if some star plays herself: its no longer play.

(b) In rule play you assume or adopt the rules. Not completely, you must remain able to get rid of them; otherwise it's no longer play. Our society perhaps is so grim because so many people soon completely identify with their initial playing roles, cannot put them off. Faculty meetings are fun when you sit there and know exactly that there is, in every colleague, two control systems active, one of them eagerly subjugating the other one, and it becomes funfun when you start imagining in whom the primary is subjugating the secondary in whom vice versa. As soon as you present and defend your motion, you also play the game, on the basis of two control system at least, I guess.

(c) The case of the so-called function play (Buehler etc.). I think this is one of the silly punches of the misleading surface classification. Function play normally is exercise, not play, even if it makes fun, I think. Play can be the contrary of fun. Otherwise, all walking and other repeated acts would be play. Why play, when they are new, and no longer play, when they are routine? It is only when the walking control system becomes separated in two, when a shadow control system is added, that we should speak of play. E.g. when you walk and watch for your altered emotional state. Another example would be, that repetition of an act becomes play, when you repeat to find out how the repeated item changes by repeating, e.g. uttering over and over the word "barbara". The interesting thing here is that if you analyse infant babbling in these terms it becomes much more interesting than function exercise: the hypothesis could be that in repeating utterances over and over and having a trace of their change in perception and action, this might be exactly a part of the buildup of a secondary controls system – speech as it is. (Would this possibly be a Vygotskian idea, can the knowledgeable tell me?)

(d) Pretense is an obvious case of control system reduplication: you behave as if you had other objectives than you actually have. In tricky pretense you try to hide manifestations of the primary control system, the addressee should believe in your secondary. In nice pretense you show the primary, implying that the secondary is only a joke, will be ended sooner or later.

(e) The most interesting is the symbolic, of course. Much depends, however, on the meaning ascribed to "symbolic". If you understand symbolic as highly generic, then all play is symbolic because that covers exactly, what is in the idea of control system reduplication, i.e. a secondary which is in a symbolic relation to the primary. But on this level the term symbolic loses its meaning. If you understand it more specific, then you will have to look in the specifics of the symbol system used. Planning or fantasizing in imagination or in the verbal medium, inner or outer, in consciousness or on paper, on possible courses of action, becomes then a form of play. And I tend to think it is because of the earnestness of planned work in our societies that action theorists cannot usually see the play character of planning.

But in general, Piaget probably misled Vygotsky and us, when he saw the symbolic coordinated rather than superordinated to other forms such as rule and

pretense play; perhaps this added to the error of almost identifying the symbolic with the verbal.

Development: Now the most interesting consequences of a conditional-genetic construct of play of the kind sketched is that we come nearer, at least in my mind, to its role in explaining psychological development. You could say that reduplication of control systems is the result of a learning process. Culture offers legions of models for trial secondaries, e.g. myths, ideals etc. Hopefully people personalize or adapt them when they adopt them. However, when the secondary, as a whole or in parts, becomes a genuine part of or integrated into the primary, namely that control system that assures unity of the person and lifelong continuity, then we speak of development. So (playful) production of secondary control systems, something of which is integrated into the person, is certainly a major vehicle of development.

An interesting follow-up question would be whether or not a third or superior, arbiter type, control system is needed; I would tend to hold that for possible but not necessary. Of course, socialization agents act exactly as arbiters.

Sorry to repeat, although perhaps in more abstract terms, some of the ideas Ageliki Nicopoulou put forward in her excellent and thoughtful contribution. My note was composed in essence before I got her message. But then I thought it might interest anyhow and would in addition introduce some of me to the folks at xlhc.

Bye --- Fred

Dienstag, 28. Mai 1991 21:19 Uhr

Alfred Lang

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[next AL message](#)

1.24. Date: Wed, 29 May 91 12:55:42 EDT

From: William Damon
Subject: Getting clear about play
To: xlhc@UCSD.BitNet

Thanks to all for the good insights about play, pretense, and symbols. But I think that any treatment of play will remain somewhat muddled as long as we identify play with a certain type of activity (or "slice of behavior" as I believe someone called it). In a rigorous sense, play isn't a thing at all; the word, as Susannah Miller once wrote, should be used as an adverb and not a noun. Anything can be done playfully or not. Play is an orientation or an attitude. Its opposite is a serious, reality-oriented attitude. In play, one molds reality to the desires or abilities of the self, whereas in

serious activity one does the opposite. This is what Piaget meant when he called play a pure case of assimilation, not balanced by accommodation. A playful attitude has some markers, such as accompanying signs of pleasure, creativity, spontaneity, and so on, though these are not essential criteria that define all cases. They are frequent companions because of the conditions that the orientation stimulates. What gets interesting developmentally is the connection between a playful orientation and the symbolic capacity that is critical for higher mental processes. Here Vygotsky elaborated on Piaget's vision, pointing to the way in which a playful attitude encourages fantasy which in turn encourages the use of representational objects (a broomstick for a horse) or people (a sister for a sister!) which in turn encourages the capacity for symbolic thought. Ageliki spelled this out nicely in her message, though I disagree with her final conclusion. Symbolic play should indeed decline with age, simply because any pure form of play (again, taken rigorously as an attitude) must. As we develop, it gets harder and harder to engage in any mode without awareness of all the others. So an artist may use a playful orientation while working (Freud called it "regression in the service of the ego") but may still be thinking about the exhibit deadline next week. The other concerns don't just "go away." Post-childhood, except under unusual states or conditions, you will see little pure-form play, symbolic or otherwise, though lots of vestigial play harnessed to other adaptive purposes.

Bill Damon

1.25. Date: Wed, 29 May 91 11:43:29 PDT

From: cole@casbs.Stanford.EDU (Michael Cole)
Subject: clear about play?
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Bill- Your very clear statement of a piagetian view of play as all to ego/assimilation versus all to other/serious activity/accommodation juxtaposed with the synonymous rendering of activity and "a slice of behavior evokes two reactions in me.

(in addition to my admiration for the clarity of the statement!).

1. Anxiety about using the same words within different paradigms and causing confusion.
2. A desire to argue that you are missing a crucial third term, which of course, coming from me, means culture.

I won't argue these points in detail.. It may be just my problem. But it seems to me that the Piagetian dichotomy allows no way to describe the rich variability of play with respect to everyday human activity. Most of us, most of the time, are mixing play, work, affiliation, peer interaction, and learning whether we are on the job, at school,

driving down the freeway, or fixing a flat tire. How do we describe this dynamic mixed quality of mind/emotion?

mike

1.26. Date: Thu, 30 May 91 11:29 MET

From: (Inger Bernth) MORTENSEN@vax.psl.ku.dk
Subject: On play and culture.
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Helen Schwartzman in her good but not recent book "Transformations" subtitled The anthropology of play or something like that, has a footnote to the effect that many anthropologists have notes on play in their field notes, but the subject does not carry over into their publications. So one has to be careful!

Inger Bernth, Psych.Lab. Univ. of Copenhagen.

1.27. Date: Fri, 31 May 91 17:28 +2

From: HAKKARAINEN@JYLK.JYU.FI
Subject: Mail from HAKKARAINEN@FINJYU.BITNET, HAKKARAINEN@JYLK.jyu.fi (U of Jyväskylä)
To: xlchc@UCSD.EDU

Re:Getting clear about play

I would like to disagree with Bill Damon about play. He is correct in stating that play isn't a thing at all. But the old distinction playful- serious is as misleading as saying that play or any other activity type is a thing. I think we have a common goal when we try to explain development through play. This is why it is necessary to discuss what are the units of our analysis and how play is connected with development. I think many of explanations are not so good in this relation. I think that picture of play which is based on individual psychological functions is problematic as Ageliki Nicolopoulou demonstrated. But the original problem in this discussion was cultural differences and change in play (playful behavior).

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1.28. Date: Mon, 3 Jun 91 08:53 EDT

From: ELLICE@vms.cis.pitt.edu
Subject: culture and play

To: xlchc@ucsd.EDU

I had a chance to discuss this topic a bit last week with Suzanne Gaskins while I was in Philadelphia. For your information Mike, she does have data on children older than two and is planning on collecting more data on the symbolic play of Mayan children over the next few years. Her reaction to the question about cultural variation in play was consistent with Ageliki's perspective. She finds very little symbolic play in Mayan children but she interprets this not as a capacity deficit (or difference) but a performance difference. That is, she feels that some cultures encourage symbolic play and others don't. When I asked her to speculate about the probable causes of these variations, she thought they might be related to the importance of creativity in that cultural setting. She didn't know about many other cross cultural studies of play--although she says that other cross cultural researchers have made some informal observations, speculations about play. She recalls that Elinor Ochs speculated that other activities--like teasing--may provide children with experiences that are, in some respects, functionally equivalent to symbolic play.

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1.29. Date: Mon, 3 Jun 91 08:32:31 PDT

From: cole@casbs.Stanford.EDU (Michael Cole)
Subject: culture/play
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Thanks a lot, Ellice, for the report of a chat with Susan Gaskins. I certainly look forward to her writeup of children in the 3-5 year old range. And it adds a stick or two of fuel to the fire (e.g., she reports little symbolic play among Mayan kids).

Over the weekend I discovered that there is a bibliography at the end of Jahoda and Lewis, *Acquiring culture: cross cultural studies of child development*. Croom Helm. London. Circa 1989 that makes reference to some studies of drawing and play. If I find anything juicy there I will pass it along.

mike

1.30. Date: Tue, 4 Jun 91 17:50:49 +0100

From: Phil Agre
Subject: more thoughts on culture and play
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

My head hasn't let go of the question of play, culture, and activity. Here are a few more thoughts on the subject which may be worth pursuing.

1. M. H. Goodwin's new book "He-Said-She-Said" (just out; I can't remember the publisher) is a marvelously entertaining account of the organization of play among groups of boys and girls in one neighborhood (in Philadelphia, I believe). It is particularly strong on the interactions between forms of language-use (for example, what Goffman called 'participation structures') and forms of activity (for example, the boys' complex 'factories' and the girls' complex jump-rope games).

2. The content of the childrens' games is not arbitrary, but often exhibits a clear concern with the 'larger', 'adult' world. This is seen as well in children's drawings. Child therapists like Klein and Winnicott have quite interesting things to say about the content of these games and artworks, but their analysis stops at the level of the family. It seems like an important project to analyze play in terms of transformations of 'larger' political and economic issues. Such an analysis would need to historicize the category of 'the family' (which is, needless to say, not the fixed essence it is made out to be within various reactionary social movements). The family might be viewed as a collective

Subject: both as the product of social conditions and as an important site for various forms of consciousness of those conditions. In particular, the epistemological situation of children might entail social conditions being 'refracted' through the outward relationships and inward dynamics of the family. This would explain why therapists encounter family concerns in their decodings of children's play and art; a deeper analysis would probably find further issues.

3. When adults play it is usually called something else. Ritual and carnival are good candidates. Augusto Boal's book "Theatre of the Oppressed" (London: Pluto Press, 1979) spins a critique of the Aristotelian conception of theatre, with special reference to the divide between the 'audience' and the 'players'. This might be thought of as a historically specific alienation of play, so that play is staged by specialists (theatrical performers, sports teams, movie stars) and enjoyed vicariously by audiences who actively shape its meanings but are nonetheless sitting on their butts rather than participating. Mikhail Bakhtin's book on Rabelais has also provoked a lot of discussion of carnival, most of which unfortunately is uninformed by rigor or by empirical work. The best of them, at least of the ones I've seen, is Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's marvelous book "The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (London: Methuen, 1986). Its opening takes great care to historicize the category of 'carnival' and then to work out its dialectics with detailed reference to terrific topics like pigs.

Phil Agre University of Sussex

2. Artifacts 1991: 1 / 10

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2.1. Date: Tue, 28 May 91 12:02:42 PDT

From: cole@casbs.Stanford.EDU (Michael Cole)
Subject: Dewey's instru-mentalism
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu
Cc: KA.ROB@Forsythe.Stanford.EDU, gaea@casbs.Stanford.EDU

In a number of different discussions the question of links between tool use and thought, American pragmatism and Soviet cultural- historical school, and allied issues have come up. Tony Scott found a book, L. Hickman, *John Dewey's Pragmatic Technnology*, which illuminates this thicket of questions in very exciting (to me) ways. I recommend the book for its power to unite many different threads of x-family discussion. Here are some examples.

1. Ideas are artifacts. In discussing a notion of cultural mediation built from the notion of artifact-mediation, I found myself saying to Robbie Case's class the other day that of course, ideas are artifacts. Incredulity greeted this strange way of talking and I found myself (and my audience) frustrated at not being able to reach a clearer understanding of each other's ideas, even if we could not reach agreement about which ideas were "better."

Hickman, p. 46-47: ...In his address to the Philosophical Club of Columbia University in 1916 Dewey]...argued that the objects of logic- the things referred to by words such as "if,""or,"" and "the number 2"- are not physical properties of things that we just grasp in some type of "rational apprehension." They do not exist "mentally," nor do they exist in some metaphysical realm that is neither physical nor mental. Instead, they are just tools. Like crutches, skates, and pedals, they are just things that formerly existed (in some sense perhaps as raw materials) in nature and that have been reshaped so that we can more efficiently control the performances of certain tasks.

This strikes me as an almost perfect paraphrase of ideas to be found in cultural historical writings from the 20's and early 30's, the work of Engestrom, and many others.

Hickman, p. 24-25 ...Dewey's instrumentalist account of knowledge-getting ["inquiry", "thinking", "imagining" -MC] cuts across the "inner-versus- outer" or "mind-versus-body prejudices that have been part of metaphysics since the time of Plato. Screwdrivers, X-ray machines, and mathethematical concepts such as the square root of -1 are, from the standpoint of Dewey's ...theory of inquiry, the same...

Hickman, p. 12. "In *Experience and Nature* Dewey specifically identified ideas as artifacts." (p. 301 of E&N)

2. You need time in the unit of analysis. There is a good deal of very interesting material on the need for genetic analysis and the non-linear nature of cultural time.

3. There is discussion of an explicit rejection of realism and idealism which hinges both on the concept of time and rejection of the inside-outside distinction.

4. There is a discussion of the great similarities between Dewey and the late Wittgenstein including the statement that Dewey's notion of "conjoint activity" is a synonym for Wittgenstein's notion of "language game."

5. both use the tool-kit metaphor of culture (e.g. Both D and W). There is a good deal more on theory and practice, history, and art, all of which has surfaced in x-family discussions in recent months. A great example of why the study of history is not, for us, an antiquarian hobby but a mode of inquiry of essential importance to our present circumstances as we worry about the re-forming of theories and a variety of cultural practices (including the practice of theorizing and bs'ing on e-mail!).

mike

2.2. Date: Wed, 29 May 1991 12:55 EST

From: JWERTSCH@CLARKU.BitNet
Subject: Dewey on tools
To: xlhc@UCSD.BITNET

I really liked the message Mike put out on how ideas are artifacts and how that at first glance seems to confuse us. I think the reason for the confusion is that we still tend to think of individual action as something that an individual carries out and that artifacts are somehow secondary in our units of analysis or even irrelevant. I would again argue for the need to take something like MEDIATED ACTION as the basic unit of analysis. This means that the basic notion of agency is individual-operating-with-mediational-means. In an essential sense tools, artifacts, mediational means, or whatever are as essential to the unit as is the individual or group using them. The irreducible core of agency helps one focus on why items such as ideas can be appropriately thought of as tools.

One problem of emphasis in the message from Mike (not his problem, but Dewey's, at least in the particular quote at issue). Mike reports Dewey's idea that with the help of tools "can more efficiently control the performance of certain tasks." This is probably true, but to focus on the efficiency aspect is to overlook other major forces that go into the shaping of tools. In many cases they have not been formed in the service of cognitive efficiency at all. Rather, there are many other cultural,

historical, and institutional factors that shape them. This is absolutely essential to recognize in an analysis of tools and of how they shape mental and social processes. Indeed, I think it is the key to creating a genuinely sociocultural or sociocultural approach to mind.

Jim Wertsch
JWERTSCH@CLARKU

2.3. Date: Wed, 29 May 91 10:33:19 PDT

From: cole@casbs.Stanford.EDU (Michael Cole)
Subject: Re: Ideas are artifacts
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Jim-

These are absolutely core ideas that need clarification badly. I found it very difficult to make myself understood on this topic. I had a very strong sense of talking across paradigms. I remain very unclear about the mediated ACTION vs. mediated ACTIVITY distinction and I slide incoherently back and forth across them. I do not think that the problem of efficiency should be misunderstood. This is "efficiency as perceived from ego's point of view," e.g. coordination on ego's terms. When you write that there are many other cultural, historical, and institutional factors that go into shaping them" you mean a social form/ideology which shifts the power ratios between the individual and the socio-cultural orders of "efficiency." So, I understand that this is a battle ground, but what is its general theoretical significance? Is it just idealism/"signocentrism" versus some form of materialism which get parodied in the direction of stimulus--response, as Albukhanova-Slavskaya wrote concerning Leontiev? And what, most of all, its is PRACTICAL significance? What are the instrumentalities of these different world views? Yrjo has suggested a few criteria differentiating these world views (historicity/importance accorded the social order in shaping human nature, and another I don't recall. I'll discuss this issue with Zinchenko and if I can make anything of what he says I'll post it, either here at the XLCHC level or in XACT if things develop in that direction.

mike

PS- Read Hickman's book. Its terrifically clear and interesting.

2.4. Date: Thu, 30 May 1991 12:50 EST

From: JWERTSCH@CLARKU.BitNet
Subject: artifacts
To: xlchc@UCSD.BITNET
Mike and others- I certainly plan to read Hickman. I just ordered it.

My comments had to do with the fact that artifacts of just about any kind are typically shaped by forces OTHER than those concerning the individual and the individual's mental functioning. The QWERTY keyboard is the kind of example I have in mind (as outlined in *Voices of the Mind*), but my point is that the same principle organizes artifacts or mediational means of all other sorts as well. For example, the kinds of speech patters used in formal instruction (what Bakhtin might call speech genres) are often approached as if they were shaped to provide maximum cognitive benefit to the individual. Scholars such as Bourdieu have argued that they might have as much to do with sorting people out in an institutionally legitimated way as with any kind of cognitive efficacy, efficiency, or whatever.

In short, the mediational means which play such a central role in shaping mental and social functioning from a Vygotskian perspective are often "spin-offs" of other ongoing institutional, historical, and cultural forces. In some cases it is even possible to make a good argument that one would specifically NOT design an artifact as it exists if one designed it from the perspective of individual cognitive efficiency. I find Don Norman's ideas about the intelligent design of everyday machines extremely interesting in this connection.

This is not just a fact (perhaps a sad fact) of life for the analysis of mental functioning. It is central since I believe it provides a major key to understanding how mental functioning and social processes are inherently socioculturally situated.

Jim Wertsch
JWERTSCH@CLARKU

2.5. Date: Fri, 31 May 91 16:17:45 PDT

From: cole@casbs.Stanford.EDU (Michael Cole)
Subject: re:artifacts
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Jim-

Certainly artifacts arise from constraints at many levels of the bio-socio-cultural system called homo sapiens. And certainly, artifacts cannot be assessed as univocal/unidimensional objects. And certainly schooling selects as 50% of its function (at least!) and we should never be taken in by the rhetoric of schools as places for developmental transformation UPWARD. However, to say that an artifact exists in the presents because it has mediated activity in the past and been passed down (and taken up!) in the present does not mean that one privileges any one level of analysis or any one point of view. That is, artifact mediation and efficiency should not be equated. In fact, we do indeed judge many artifacts as having long term negative implications for human development/survival/well being, etc. But that must be considered a matter of point of view, not of raw fact. For

example, there was a time, not all that long ago, when tobacco was believed to have various medicinal properties and was prized on that account. That new cultural object and associated practices has spread world wide. It is now under attack by an alternative set of belief/artifacts. But we cannot understand its spread as other than an example of a general process where directionality is always to be suspect. I hold similar beliefs about such artifacts as gun powder and atomic energy; they are harmful to human development. I may well be wrong, but that too is irrelevant to the general laws of artifact-mediated action/activity. All of this fits with the correlated idea that words are always polysemic; they may survive and propogate for reasons that have little to do with the sense that I make of them in my own life.

The weekend is upon us.

mike

2.6. Date: Tue, 4 Jun 1991 09:17:29 +0000

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From: Alfred Lang
Subject: artifacts
To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet

Mike

Could we conceive of artifacts in a non-Cartesian world? That is, try to understand how entities interact among themselves rather than how they impress themselves upon us. In a Cartesian view of the world, cognitive systems in humans (res cogitantes) are thought to be completely different from artifacts (which are just another form of res extensae). In a non-Cartesian view it is exciting to see that cognitive systems and artifacts are similar in many respects.

Cognitive systems come to exist by series of acts (perception, action and presumed ones in between). The same is obviously true of artifacts. Cognitive systems, always in a very broad sense, including motivational aspects) serve as control systems governing actions of the individuals. The same is valid for artifacts: spatial structures guide our orienting behavior and locomotion, everyday things in our dwellings constantly engage our attention and steer our actions, from sitting to cooking to eating to reading and even at night a bed is catching us, not to speak of books and artwork. And we spend a life's worktime for gathering all the chunk. Tools, machines and instruments of all sorts including computers exert considerable power in channeling our actions, although they might leave sometimes some degrees of freedom, if we care.

Both, cognitive systems and artifacts are structural result of recursive and changing processes, within the limits of ontogenesis or in cultural change respectively, and

both types of structures are dynamic, have a potential for self-regulation. Both are not self-sufficient entities, but they need a complement: a natural and cultural environment in the case of the cognitive system, a cognitive (including perception and action) systems in the case of artifacts; reduced to itself both would simply stop to exist.

So cognitive systems and artifacts act upon each other. If this is trivial, it is nevertheless true and not at all part of our conception of ourselves existence in the world.

There are more similarities and also a number of interesting differences. But since we Cartesians are so accustomed to the differences, I thought it might be worth while to point out some similarities.

Sorry for the note on play being too long.

Bye --- Fred

Dienstag, 4. Juni 1991

Alfred Lang Psychol.Inst., Univ.

Bern, Switzerland

[next AL message](#)

2.7. Date: Tue, 04 Jun 91 10:18:21 ADT

From: HUNT000

Subject: transactions

To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet

Fred's note connects for me with something I haven't heard a lot about here -- the Dewey-Bentley notion of transaction (*Knowing and the Known*, 1949), which seems to me to provide just the framework I need to think about artifacts in a non-Cartesian world, and about the ways in which cognitive systems and artifacts act upon each other. Hickman, in his book (which on Mike's recommendation I rushed out and got), reports that in his last letter to Bentley Dewey said "he would like to write "on *knowing* as the way of behaving in which linguistic artifacts transact business with physical artifacts, tools, implements, apparatus, both kinds being planned for the purpose and rendering *inquiry* of necessity an *experimental transaction* . . ." I haven't got far enough to see how Hickman/Dewey would relate those "linguistic artifacts" to "cognitive systems," but I have my suspicions.

-- Russ

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                                _~|__
Russell A. Hunt                _~|__)_ _)_~|__          BITNET: hunt@unb
Department of English          )_ _)_|_)__ _)_ INTERNET: hunt@unb.ca
St. Thomas University         | )____) |
Fredericton, New Brunswick___|____|____|____/

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E3B 5G3 CANADA

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~~~~~**2.9. Date: Thursday, 13 June 1991 9:31pm ET**

From: "Antonio.Bettencourt" <21600AB@MSU.BitNet>  
Subject: PLATO  
To: xlchc@ucsd.bitnet

"You know, Phaedrus, that's the strange thing about writing, which makes it truly analogous to painting. The painter's products stand before us as though they were alive, but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic silence. It is the same with written words; they seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing forever. And once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; it doesn't know how to address the right people and not address the wrong. And when it is ill treated and unfairly abused it always needs its parent to come to its help, being unable to defend or help herself." (Phaedrus, 275 d-e).

Antonio.

**2.10. Date: Fri, 14 Jun 91 10:50:21 PDT**

From: cole@casbs.Stanford.EDU (Michael Cole)  
Subject: re: artifacts/individual  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

With more delay than I intended, I am following up comments by Fred Lang, Russ Hunt, Lee \*, and now Antonio Bettencourt. Fred and Russ both bring up the notion of anti-cartesianism implicit (and, I guess, explicit too) implied by placing artifact mediation at the center of human nature, the kinship to Dewey and Bentley's transactionalism. Lee, the interesting paper she sent, discusses whether it is necessary to talk about minds/individuals at all (she was taking as an example the fact that someone can go into a room speaking (say) English, stay there for a day, and come out speaking English--doesn't that mean the person was thinking and we need to assume that in order to explain the continuity of behavior without continuity of input--this argument, by the way, goes back to Bartlett's definition of thinking as gap filling based on a similar argument). Antonio treated us to a terrific passage from Plato.

All of these message speak to the issue of how to formulate the senses in which cognition/mind is distributed, an old and always interesting topic on xlchc.

I want to use Lee's question as a starting point. I am not one of those who think it interesting (as a psychologist) to remove the living human being from the

transactions that constitute us. I can understand why, at some levels of description, one would want to do so, but I would rather treat the levels as complementary, not mutually exclusive, and take the issue of understanding transformations of structure and process between levels to be a central issue in any cultural theory of mind.

Lets add Vygotsky to the discussion: All higher psychological functions (e.g. those that are artifact-mediated-M.C.) are internalized relations of the social kind and constitute the social structure of the personality. Their composition, genetic [developmental] structure, ways of functioning, in one word all their nature is social. Even when they have become psychological processes their nature remains quasi-social. THE HUMAN BEING WHO IS ALONE REMAINS A FUNCTION OF INTERACTION (quoted in Jaan Valsiner, *Developmental Psychology in the Soviet Union*).

One caveat: LSV is not denying biological contributions to all human psychological functioning. He is assuming that higher psychological functions build on and transform the inter-functional relations of the biological substratum. That is a different topic.

In so far as human thought is acquired as a function of mediated actions in mediated activity, then the internal transformations of those actions will have a morphology that retains aspects of the inter-personal activity of which they were a part. In so far as the artifacts are crystallized bits of prior cultural- history, they retain elements of socialness which are inherent in them.

About writing. Plato also wrote that knowledge obtained through writing is inauthentic, providing the semblance of knowledge where none exists. Why? Precisely because one cannot hold a full dialogue with a text, but only a truncated one. For him, the only true knowledge comes from inquiry-in- dialogue where one CAN argue "with the text." Writing is sort of an intermediate case between the guy in the room all alone and the person in dialogue. In each case, we have shards of prior interaction which we use to re-create an "original" which is, until we try out our version of the original in a new activity, no more certain than the knowledge obtained from the shadows on the wall of Plato's cave.

I have been looking to buy a copy of Dewey and Bentley. I couldn't understand it when I Ray McDermott got me to read it several years ago. Is there an in-print version to be found?

mike

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## 3. Layerism 1991: 6 / 31

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### 3.1. Date: Thu, 8 Aug 91 15:53:54 pdt

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
Subject: geological metaphors  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

I am trying to track down some relations between cultural-historical and psychoanalytic ideas based on the geological metaphor. Jim Wertsch discusses this issue some in *\*Voices of the Mind\** in terms of the issue of heterogeneity of thought. He point to Werner's notions from *\*The Comparative Psychology of Mental Development\** ("man possesses more than one level of behavior; and ...at different moments one and the same man may belong to different genetic lables" --p. 39 of 1957 reprint of 1948 edition.

Question: What year was this published in German?

Why?

Well, because Vygotsky, who borrowed a lot from Werner, cites Kretschmer as the source of this metaphor (p. 155 of Jim W's edited volume on activitytheory). He says that Kretschmer called this idea the "law of stratification in history." Basic notion: older, lower, centers do not simply "fall by the wayside." Their functioning is reorganized and subordinated to higher/later systems.

LSV used this work in thinking about functional organization of the brain as

did Luria later.

Question: Where did Kretschmer write this, and when?

Why?

Well, because what is perhaps the most famous use of the geographical metaphor I know of is Freud's in *\*Civilization and its discontents\**. Date-1930. Same date as *\*The Development of Higher Psychological Functions\**, part of which is in the Wertsch activity theory book.

Perhaps these questions are best suited for xhistory, but the issue seems general enough to warrant posting here.... I hope!

mike

### 3.2. Date: Fri, 09 Aug 1991 10:00:42 EDT

From: Joe Glick <jag@CUNYVMS1.GC.CUNY.EDU>  
Subject: Werner  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

The book that is most often referred to is the German edition of the Comparative Psychology book (first english 1940). The German book that Vygotsky cites is *Einführung in die Entwicklungspsychologie* dated 1926. In the translation of the Russian edition of Vygotsky (Plenum) Werner is misidentified in the index as Verner (but even at that, the english editions are cited).

No answer on other question.

Point for those who edit - its a mess trying to figure out historical relations when the "updated" references are given to make things more accessible to audiences. Shouldn't all references to a work be given? Certainly we would want the earliest and any editions that represent significant additions, reformulations, etc..

Joe Glick

### 3.3. Date: Tue, 13 Aug 1991 12:31:50 +0000

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From: Alfred Lang <lang@psy.unibe.ch>  
Subject: re: geological metaphor (layers, Schichtenlehre)  
To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet

Mike,

The layer metaphor has had a virulent history in psychology, philosophy-dominated psychology at that, and, almost exclusively, personality theory, in the German speaking area, almost exclusively it seems, and, say, between the twenties and the fifties. It has all but disappeared from the contemporary psychological literature, is now reduced to tiny mentionings or plain nothings in psychological dictionaries, may have some life left in some pedagogical circles.

As a rule it has been traced back to Plato and Aristote, which might not be completely wrong, however, it is probably rather an attempt at answering Darwinism and, it seems, an expression of the *Naturwissenschaften* vs.-*Geisteswissenschaften* split in the late 19th century. Something like save the higher nature of man by emphasizing spiritual, i.e. higher, layers while accepting his animal nature by restricting it to (a) lower layer(s). So it is a part of the idealisms vs. empiricism debate, an attempt at reconciliation of nature and spirit, with the voluntaristic touch that appears to become fashionable at present once again. The



response to Haeckel seems important, although not at the origin. Of high influence is usually thought the philosopher Eduard von Hartmann (1842-1906: Philosophie des Unbewussten 1868; Wahrheit und Irrtum im Darwinismus 1875; Die moderne Psychologie, 1901).

Important later figures are Erich Rothacker (Die Schichten der Persoenlichkeit 1938) and Philip Lersch (Der Aufbau der Person 1954; endothymer Grund vs. noetischer Oberbau). These conceptions almost ideologically dominated the characterology of the thirties, they obviously had some affinity to Nazi ideology. Some of the exponents saved themselves into the fifties, layers have all but vanished in the period from 1960 to 80.

If there is interest I could look into early editions of Kretschmer. But I think the idea of layers was so pervasive in psychiatric (thought vs. affect) and differential psychology (personality diagnostic, Charakterologie) thinking of the first half of the century that particular quotations are probably not really indicative.

But I am no specialist, am giving details mostly from memory some 25-30 years old with insufficient reference works at hand. I remember a critical review in a book edited by H. v. Bracken and H.P. David (1959) Perspektiven der Persoenlichkeitstheorie, that has simultaneously been published in English with a similar title.

Hope this is of help to Mike and some interest to others.

Bye --- Alfred

Dienstag, 13. August 1991 14:31 Uhr

Alfred Lang

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e-mail: lang@psy.unibe.ch

next AL message

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### **3.4. Date: Tue, 13 Aug 91 11:42:55 pdt**

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)

Subject: layers

To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Thanks for the background on the geological metaphor, Alfred. For other xlchc-ers here is the context for the question. Evgenii Subbotski and I are working on a paper to be given in the fall in honor of E. Boesch, a man who has written about cultural psychology and who is recently retired from U. of Sarbrücken. Our topic is the question of how new stages of development relate to earlier stages, a question

which Evgenii raised a few years ago in an early attempt at running seminars in parallel in the USSR and the US (back before e-mail was available, but when telecomm was just starting up).

One form of the issue is to be found in the recent issue of Human Development by Evgenii on life span changes in the object concept where he shows that children and adults will give up the notion of object constancy in some contexts. Paul Harris quite correctly points out broader implications of this finding with respect to issues of "primitive mind."

As it turns out, Jim Wertsch raises the issue in *Voices of the Mind* in conjunction with the issue of synchronic heterogeneity of thought, citing the work of Peeter Tulviste (whose book on cultural-historical analysis of verbal reasoning is supposed to be published any time now in English).

What follows is part of the introduction to Subbotski-Cole paper which is still in process. If you are not interested in the issue, now is the time to bail!

(Alfred- Please do send more info on the precursors and Nazi uses of the metaphor. Better to know about them and wrestle with them than to ignore the issue it seems to me).

mike

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Our discussion will touch upon the problem of "old knowledge" on two genetic levels, the ontogenetic and the cultural-historical, as well as the relationship between the two.

#### Early 20th Century Proposals

We are not entirely sure about the correct chronology of psychological thought on this issue. Perhaps the most well known discussion is that presented in Freud's monograph, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930). Regarding what he called the "problem of preservation," Freud rejected the idea that old knowledge is obliterated, preferring instead the hypothesis that "in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish--that everything is somehow preserved..."

Freud likened the layering of knowledge in the mind to the layers of history in Rome:

Historians tell us that the oldest Rome was the *Roma Quadrata*, a fenced settlement on the Palatine. Then followed the phase of the *Septimontium*, a federation of the settlements on the different hills.; after that came the city bounded by the Servian wall; and later still, after all the transformations during the periods

the republic and the early Ceasars, the city which the Emporer Aurelian surrounded with his walls. We will not follow the changes which the city went through any further, but we will ask ourselves how much a visitor, whom we will suppose to be equipped with the most complete historical and topographical knowledge, may still find left of these early stages in the Rome of to-day. Except for a few gaps, he will see the wall of Aurelian almost unchanged. In some places he will be able to find sections of the Servian wall where they have been excavated and brought to light. If he knows enough--more than present day archeology does-- he may perhaps be able to trace out in the plan of the city the whole course of that wall and the outline of the Roma Quadrata...The best information about Rome in the republican era would only enable him at the most to point out the where the temples and public buildings of that period stood...It is hardly necessary to remark that all these remains of ancient Rome are found dovetailed into the jumble of a great metropolis which has grown up in the last few centuries since the Renaissance.(Freud, 1930, p. 16-17).

Freud goes on to examine the applicability of this metaphor to human mental life. After probing various problems with the metaphor, he concludes with the comment that "We can only hold fast to the fact that it is rather the rule than the exception for the past to be preserved in mental life" (p. 19).

Vygotsky seems to have been of two minds regarding the fate of old knowledge. At some points in his writing he seems to claim that when children reach the stage of true, scientific, concepts, their entire conceptual apparatus is reorganized. At other times he appears to adopt a version of Freud's belief in the co- presence of different levels during ontogeny. Writing at approximately the same time as Freud, Lev Vyotsky used a "geological" metaphor, which he attributes to Ernst Kretschmer, a German psychiatrist.

"In my opinion," he wrote, one of the most fruitful ideas genetic psychology has adopted is that the structure of behavioral development to some degree resembles the geological structure of the earth's core. Research has estbalished the presence of genetically differentiated layws in human behavior. In this sense the geology of human beavhior is undoubtedly a reflection of "geological" descent and brain development (1930/1971, p. 155).

Vygotsky applied this "law of stratification" in the history of devepment both to understanding the ontogenesis and regression of behavior resulting from brain insults and to the ontogeny of conception. With respect to his well known studies of concept formation, for example, he wrote that even adults do not always think in terms of true concepts. Their everyday thinking is carried out largely with the use of complexes and pseudo- concepts, and sometimes even more primitive conceptual forms (Vygotsky, 1934/1987, p. ??).

Vygotsky also cited Heinz Werner, whose monograph, Comparative Psychology of Mental Development appeared in 1926 in German. Werner quite explicitly draws

the parallel between ontogeny and cultural-history. Declaring that human beings may vary in the genetic level of their thinking from one moment to the next, Werner suggested that "In this demonstrable fact that there is a plurality of mental levels lies the solution of the mystery of how the European mind can understand primitive types of mentality (1948, p. 39).

### **3.5. Date: Tue, 13 Aug 1991 04:38:15 PDT**

From: "Leigh Star" <leigh\_star@irl.com>  
Subject: article on layers  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Mike:

I used the layers metaphor in a recent article:

"Layered Space, Formal Representations and Long-Distance Control: The Politics of Information," *Fundamenta Scientiae*, 10 (1990), 125-55.

Hopefully in a way that escapes and challenges some of the traditional hierarchical modes.

In that article I also discuss another one by Martin Rudwick on layers in geology, an historical case study of the way the geological community learned to "read" stratigraphical layers, and how their formal language depended on the development of a community of practice. That ref is:

Rudwick, Martin J.S. "The emergence of a visual language for geological science, 1760-1840," *History of Science* 14 (1976), 149-195.

Susan Leigh Star (Leigh)  
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### **3.6. Date: Tue, 13 Aug 91 12:12:10 pdt**

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
Subject: layers  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Jim Wertsch's book has an interesting discussion of heterogeneity with and without genetic (developmental) hierarchy, a propos of Leigh's note.

mikec

**3.7. Date: Tue, 13 Aug 1991 15:34 EST**

From: DON'T PANIC HITCHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY \*LBRYNES@vax.clarku.edu\*  
Subject: layered back  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Wish it weren't such a BUZY time or I'd wax on... actually I'm still  
thinking about Antonio and Vico. But quickly....

At Clark U there is much costernation when geographpy is conflated with  
geology...nonetheless

I think that the conception of a stratified mentality used by Vygotsky, which is attributed to Werner and Kretschmer goes back at least as far as Hegel. Werner and Kaplan refer to this conception, and attribute it to Hegel [Vorlesungen uber die Philosophie der Geschichte] in their book SYMBOL FORMATION.

((((Actually I'd go back at the very least in the west to creative stone throwing by the greeks, itself a throw back to CataL H.)))

Trying to get Bernie Kaplan on-line...hope so soon.

Lois

**3.8. Date: Tuesday, 13 August 1991 5:16pm ET**

From: "Antonio.Bettencourt" <21600AB@MSU.BitNet>  
Subject: LAYERS  
To: xlchc@ucsd.bitnet

Mike and other Layerophiles: I think this may be of interest. Ludwik Fleck in *The Genesis and Development of a scientific Fact* speaks about the historical sedimentation of scientific concepts. His concept of proto-ideas that are fossilized into our modern concepts is certainly geological. If you are interested I'll give more detailed references (I do not have the books here). As far as I know the only attempt to use this way of thinking was by Baldanus & Schnelle in an artice about the permanence of occult philosophy in mechanistic thinking of the sixteenth through the eigtheenth-century. I find the idea appealing in the history of chemical ideas. Think of the Democritean atomism "fossilized" into our modern models of the atom, despite the fact that quantum mechanical models are very different from Democritus ideas. There is a paper in here somewhere but I do not want to write it. Antonio.

**3.9. Date: Tue, 13 Aug 91 20:22:35 pdt**

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
Subject: go for it AB!!  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Oh, Antonio! Don't tease us with your special form of knowledge. If it does not interfere with more important problems in your life, by all means lay-er it on. The intersection between your ontogeny and ours is really fascinating. Besides, any non -fascist interpretation of layering would be welcome after the scare that Alfred has let us in for.

mikec

**3.10. Date: Wed, 14 Aug 91 18:35:49 EDT**

From: Antonio <21600AB@MSU.BitNet>  
Subject: GEO-FLECK  
To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet

Dear Layerophiles: Though Fleck uses geological metaphors I could not find the layers in his work. I may have lay(er)ed that on his thoughts. Well, here is what I found. Layers or no layers, Fleck is always intriguing (like Vico!).

Fleck, L. (1979). The genesis and development of a scientific fact. Translated by T. J. Trenn. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

pp. 24-25 - Can epistemology blandly ignore the fact that many scientific positions steadily developed from proto-ideas which at the time were not based upon the type of proof considered valid today? This question should be reflected upon and investigated. But if we may borrow a hypothesis from the pre-history of paleontology, a proto-idea must not be construed as a "freak of nature." Proto-ideas must be regarded as developmental rudiments of modern theories and as originating from a socio-cognitive foundation.

pp. 25-26 - Any absolute criterion of judgment as to suitability is as invalid for fossilized theories as a chronologically independent criterion would be for the adaptability of some paleontological species. The brontosaurus was as suitably organized for its environment as the modern lizard is for its own. If considered outside its proper environmental context, however, it could be called either "adapted" or "unadapted".

Rothenstreich, N. (1986). The proto-ideas and their aftermath. In R. S. Cohen & T. Schnelle (Eds.), *Cognition and fact: Materials on Ludwik Fleck* (pp. 161-178).

Schnelle, T. & Baldamus, W. (1978). Mystic modern science: Sociological reflections on the strange survival of the occult within the rational mechanistic world view. *Zeitschrift fur Sociologie*, 7(3), 251-266.

Abstract: The sociology of science has so far mainly been dealing with the question of the emergence of the "new" in the so-called scientific revolutions. Here we are concerned with the opposite question of the persistence of the "old" through processes of scientific change. An important example is the transition of basic concepts of the Hermetic view of the world into those of the modern rational mechanistic one since the sixteenth-century. An examination of this development suggests that, in addition to "new" ideas, "old" ones are reinterpreted and thus substantially retained. [This paper is in English].

Antonio.

### **3.11. Date: Thu, 15 Aug 1991 04:32 EST**

From: DON'T PANIC HITCHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY \*LBRYNES@vax.clarku.edu\*  
Subject: substrata  
To: xlhc@ucsd.edu

While earlier ideas from Antonio still boil (tho cooked metaphor for mind and methodology appear passe)... the paleontology seems pathed for extension. But a developmental (sic) question for all you experts: so what is the relation of sublation (if we take the Hegel dynamic) to punctuated equilibrium?? And deeper yet, perhaps, what are the implications of plate tectonics (maybe holistically to metaphorically bring to the surface latent content of hermeticism???) Gosh, thinking to get to be fun. I do admit, as a mere humanist, that rational mechanistic has a resonance of oxymoron for me. And the cookie-cutter versions of development and evolution as the great-chain-of-being turned sideways (EVEN in someone as interesting as Waddington) is amazingly strange (if not predictable). So what happened to history? Time? I hunch a little metaphor adaptation toward chaos theory (unfortunate word) may prove transforming in a non-linear way (maybe even a fruitful mutation.) So much for morning play.

Hi Antonio.

### **3.12. Date: Thu, 15 Aug 1991 06:42 EST**

From: DON'T PANIC HITCHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY \*LBRYNES@vax.clarku.edu\*  
Subject: a shift in discourse  
To: xlhc@weber.ucsd.edu

If one(sic) is looking for some kind of 'origin' for the idea of not only a heterogeneity of the self or mind, but a heterogeneity constituted thru discursive activities in a society, one might as well go back to the ancient Greeks. Lanham, in his *MOTIVES FOR ELOQUENCE*, discusses the conflict in ancient Greece between the Plato and

the Platonists who advocated a TRUE, INVARIANT SELF, above and beyond the contingencies of everyday existence, and the RHETORICAL SELF, who adopted diverse personae in different situations and repeatedly practiced what today, following Bakhtin, are called 'speech genres' pertinent to such different situations.

The socio-political 'need' for a true self or an invariant person in a social order is, to some extent, alluded to in Marcel Mauss' classic paper on the category of a person. (whoops) A recent book (ed. Carrithers et al) THE CATEGORY of THE PERSON, reprints Mauss' article as well as a series of commentaries on it by Momigliani, Lukes, Taylor.....

This kind of material should have some bearing (is that leaning or direction?) on the 'origins' of sociocultural OR socio-historical approach to mind.

### **3.13. Date: 91-08-16 13:34:28 MEZ**

From: PO61170%DHHUNI4.BITNET@YALEVM.YCC.Yale.Edu  
Subject: Geological Layers, Organismic Layers and the Nazi connection  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Back from vacations I found that German speaking contributors to XLCHC have doubled during Summer. Welcome Alfred Lang and Urs Fuhrer!

The layer metaphor is indeed as old as geological observation and speculation about what force could have brought mussel shells and octopusses high up into the mountains of Himalaya, Alps, Rockies, and Ararat, of course...

Darwin's own model was indeed heavily influenced by the most recent geological knowledge of his age. He did not use a mere metaphor, but a clear and very general analogy between processes that formed Gaia (Mother Earth) and processes that formed organisms (Keywords are: Presentism and slow structural change).

Evolutionary studies of the brain -- I read a book by Jerison (?) some 15 years ago - - do show layers of the brain from the "stem" outwards. Imagine an evolutionary ordered series of structural diagrams of species specific brain structures and then you will be able to see the analogy as clear as anything theoretical could be seen.

It is important, though, to keep in mind that this analogy is only structural. We could transform it into a process analogy, too, by showing that geological processes are essentially like epigenetical processes in ontogeny.

-- I maintain, though, that this CANNOT be done, except in metaphorical talk which is much more "as-if" than a strict analogy. Consider: The living bodies that (who?) are formed out in epigenesis have internal memories incomparably more complex



like anything that could be called a memory of a geological formation, determining "behavior" differences.

Metaphors are useful to generate questions and research tasks, but usually must be transformed into analogies by being stripped of spurious similarities between the two domains of knowledge. Most important is the backwards direction when checking the metaphor - as illustrated above with the case of a "landscape memory"...

Waddington's model of the "epigenetic landscape" shows this clearly. It has several characteristics that "real" landscapes (i.e. as described by presently held geological theories) do not have. It was mainly meant as a visualization of an "abstract state space" wherein some of us are able to mathematically model evolution processes. There was XLCHC comment about Waddington, saying "This sounds very deterministic". Indeed, it was meant to explicate a kind of a dialectical, dynamic, chaos-theoretical type of determination which only presently is becoming better known in the social sciences and humanities. -- For brain theory and psychological theories of cognition see: Hermann Haken and Michael Stadler (eds.) "Synergetics of Cognition", Springer-Verlag 1990.

Alfred Lang has alerted us to a certain use of the layers metaphor that was invented by the "Lebensphilosophie" (e.g. Klages) of early 20th century. But they were NOT using geological layers on the origin side of the metaphorical relation. Instead, these authors used the already well known fact of brain layers, arguing against "modern rationalism" by recourse to "ancient deep knowledge of the living souls" of all animals. For our listeners in the humanities it may be interesting that Ludwig Klages shows up in disguise in Robert Musil's "Mann ohne Eigenschaften" (look at chapter 113, and go on from there).

Klages magnum opus was called "Geist als Widersacher der Seele" i.e. Mind/Ratio as The Perennial Opponent of Soul. Devil vs. God, indeed.

Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg surely thought similar; I have not looked into this. Other German scientist of much higher reputation also used Darwinian models to bolster the racist ideology, for instance: Hugo Dingler, 1942, in his "Von der Tierseele zur Menschenseele. Die Geschichte der geistigen Menschwerdung" (Hellingsche Verlagsanstalt, Leipzig).

Mike: On your soles I would footnote this (-:), and just keep on unfolding the geological or organismic (brain) metaphors in the way that is appropriate today.

There are so many uses of all this by all kinds of persons that one should not look at Nazi uses or at Stalinist refutations too closely, except of course, when she or he is writing a history of metaphors for phylogeny and ontogeny with regard to the whole century. Who could do this presently?

Ethel Tobach is organizing a symposium for the next world congress of psychology (Brussels, next year). Maybe a clearer picture will emerge then...

Arne.

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### **3.14. Date: Friday, 16 August 1991 7:20pm ET**

From: "Antonio.Bettencourt" <21600AB@MSU.BitNet>  
Subject: RISE OF GEOLOGY  
To: xlchc@ucsd.bitnet

I just found this reference (looking for something else I didn't find):

Thomas, H. H. (19??). The rise of geology and its influence on contemporary thought. *Annals of Science*, 5, 325-341.

Antonio.

### **3.15. Date: Sunday, 18 August 1991 8:58pm ET**

From: "Antonio.Bettencourt" <21600AB@MSU.BitNet>  
Subject: PROLEPTIC DARWIN AND THE WIFE OF CAESAR  
To: xlchc@ucsd.bitnet

He who believes that each equine species was independently created, will, I presume, assert that each species has been created with a tendency to vary, both under nature and under domestication, in this particular manner, so as often to become striped like other species of the genus; and that each has been inhabiting distant quarters of the world, to produce hybrids resembling in their stripes, not their own parents, but other species of the genus. To admit this view is, as it seems to me, to reject a real for an unreal, or at least for an unknown, cause. It makes the words of God a mere mockery and deception; I would almost as soon believe the old and ignorant cosmologists, that fossil shells had never lived, but had been created in stone so as to mock the shells living on the sea-shore.

The quote is from *The Origin of Species*, pp. 153-54, Everyman's Library, London 1982.

Scientists are not after all above all [rhetorical] suspicion, or was that the wife of Caesar? Antonio.

### 3.16. Date: Mon, 19 Aug 1991 14:24:43 +0000

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From: Alfred Lang <lang@psy.unibe.ch>  
Subject: 130 lines of layerophobic agent  
To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet

More Background to Layers in the Psychology of Personality

Plato:

Epithymia - needs - guts

Thymos - affect - chest, heart

Logos - thought, cognition - head

Max Scheler (appears to have elicited the person-related layerism during WW I, 1916)

Vitalschicht or body

Psychovitalschicht or affect and needs

Schicht der geistigen Akte

Both Freud and Klages seem to not use layer terminology (according to Wellek, I haven't checked), although their ideas on the structure of the person are obviously affine to layers. There is a widespread oscillation to be observed in layerists of the field in question between two- and three-layer versions. Freud uses both, bipartite and tripartite separations.

Klages is heavily polarizing between Geist and Seele (Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele, 1929-33). Widersacher means adversary, opponent, however, the word used is not of everyday language, it has a somewhat fundamental touch, sounds not only rather medieval but also not far off from the devil in person.

Another dualist is D. Kraus, who reduces to Tiefenperson vs. Kortikalperson. I have already mentioned Philipp Lersch with endothymic Grund vs. noetischer Oberbau; he later added a third layer, a vital layer below the endothymic one. So Plato es everpresent.

Erich Rothacker (1938), who, as I have said, is considered the one of all layer theorist having gone farthest, is perhaps more explicitly than others claiming that

all layering in the person is to be understood genetically, phylo- and ontogenetically at that. Earlier layers would never be lost but rather covered, or at best overformed by later ones, they would keep their mode of working, although not necessarily manifest at every moment. He considers the Tiefenperson (Es = Id, the Unconscious) to be almost a separate person or animal ("Lebewesen") within the person. It is "overlayed by higher centers although it is capable in many instances within the total behavior of the whole person to express itself directly" (my translation).

Much of that seems to be instigated by Haeckels biogenetic law. And, I think layer theory has a somewhat similar fate. Both ideas point to something that is not obviously wrong; however, when people try to make clear what they mean by ontogenetical replication of phylogenesis or by the various layers of the person and their relationships and effects, then nothing is clear anymore. Versions of interpretation arise that differ among them according to the area of examples that are used to illustrate. I know of no single statement that might have the capability of being empirically put to test to become clearly refuted. So layer theory lingered on until the Zeitgeist got satiated, as I have said, with some additional support from political ideology and events. There was continuous debate from the twenties to the fifties without real solution not only on the bi- vs. tripartite topic but also on the question of whether older layers are supplemented, supplanted or rather modified by later ones, i.e. whether older ones can or do have their proper effects, or whether everything what is attributed to be based in one layer is also affected by other ones, in one or in both directions.

The book edited by H. von Bracken and H.P. David appeared first in English in 1957 in London, Tavistock: Perspectives in personality theory. There is a chapter by A. Gilbert entitled somewhat like: the layer model in personality theory. He has proposed the notion of discrepancy between layers which he believes to be at the root or to be identical with neuroticism. (Discrepancy between what would be my question.) He seems to be the one American having been most fascinated by layers in personality; also G. A. Allport has been affected.

Let me close with a translation from an encyclopaedic dictionary entry by Albert Wellek from the early 70ies. Wellek was perhaps the one layer theoretician who survived longest. He favored the onion metaphor in preference to the geological one. His book *Die Polarität im Aufbau des Charakters* from 1950 was less famous than those of Lersch or Rothacker, yet nevertheless of considerable reputation. He summarizes Schichtenlehre in personlity in 8 points (p 253 in *Lexikon der Psychologie*, ed. by Arnold, Eysenck and Meili, Freiburg i.B., Herder, 1972):

1. Layer theory is a genetic theory: layers develop one from another.
2. There are in use two entirely distinct notions of "depth", only one of them being legitimate, referring to the idea of the kernel. [This is rather partisan and dogmatic,

as you easily see, and critical of Rothacker and the psychoanalyst notions; the other, by the way, refers to the idea of the primitive, the Unconscious etc. ALs comment]

3. In equally considering both notions of depth [i.e. kernel and primitive, AL] a so-to-say two-dimensional layer theory results, which unites a vertical and a horizontal layering.

4. A merely one-dimensional, "vertical" layer theory (Aufschichtungstheorie [which I would render with: layer put upon layer theory, AL]) is not justified by the most important facts of characterology. Don't ask me what he refers to, sigh, AL].

5. In conventional concepts of depth-personality issues of both the vertical and the horizontal layering are undistinctly confounded.

6. Apparent depth of a depth-, i.e. primitive, person is not identical with the unconscious. Primitive layers and their manifestations may be conscious and higher or kernel layers and their manifestations may be unconscious.

7. Even in hypnosis as well as in deep sleep, the "cortical person" is at work.

8. There is agreement that the concept of "layer" is but an image of limited use value.

To improve understanding, I add: vertical refers to the dimension going from primitive to cortical; horizontal, Wellek's favorite, goes from kernel to surface. Sorry for being harsh: I have once tried as a student to digest thousands of pages of Schichtentheorie without ever getting a stable picture of what all these terms refer let alone of clear empirical evidence for them. But I heartily agree with Wellek's point 8 above, although it seems to me that it has been clearly a case of wishful thinking on the part of Wellek at or even after the height of layer theory. Otherwise I see not motive for the heated debates.

Everything clear?

PS. I could'nt yet get hold of an old edition of Kretschmer. But I wonder and would be surprised to find him to be an original contributor to layer theory.

Bye --- Alfred

Montag, 19. August 1991 16:23 Uhr

Alfred Lang

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[next AL message](#)

**3.17. Date: Mon, 19 Aug 91 10:20 EDT**

From: "Tom Benson 814-865-4201" <T3B@PSUVM.BitNet>  
Subject: Re: PROLEPTIC DARWIN AND THE WIFE OF CAESAR  
To: 21600AB@MSU.BitNet Cc: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet

On the rhetorical Mr. Darwin:

John Angus Campbell has written a considerable series of essays on Darwin's rhetoric, and his work has now been absorbed into the so-called "rhetoric of inquiry" project. From a recent Campbell essay:

"So far were 'discovery' and 'justification' from being separate processes in Darwin's thought--the one private and imaginative and the other rational and public--the notebooks and the various editions of the ORIGIN reveal to the contrary an unbroken dialectical continuity between the two. From his first jotting in his first notebook through the sixth and final edition of the ORIGIN, scientific discovery and rhetorical invention, technical and social reason, so effectively unite in Darwin's thought that one can only say that each is an aspect of a single logic of inquiry and presentation."

quoted from John Angus Campbell, "Scientific Discovery and Rhetorical Invention: The Path to Darwin's ORIGIN," in THE RHETORICAL TURN: INVENTION AND PERSUASION IN THE CONDUCT OF INQUIRY, ed. Herbert W. Simons (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990), 86.

Tom Benson  
Penn State

**3.18. Date: Wed, 21 Aug 91 12:45 EDT**

From: SERPELL <SERPELL@UMBC>  
Subject: the metaphors of scaffolding and layers  
To: xlchc@ucsd

I hope I'm not too late to join the discussions about scaffolding and layers.

Determinism is certainly part of what bothered me about the invocation of Waddington's metaphor of the epigenetic landscape as a way of elaborating the scaffolding construct, but also it is another physical constraint image. The tradition of drawing analogies between "discoveries" in the physical sciences and alleged advances in psychological theory has received lots of discussion in the history of that discipline. But maybe it is not just the older history of the physical sciences that has made them such a popular point of reference. It seems to me that the availability of ostensive definition as a way of securing communication with one's audience has been another factor. Horton (1982) describes one of the features of what he terms "primary theory" (which seems to be widely if not universally shared

across cultures) as "push-pull causality", and floats the idea that the metaphors which gain ascendancy in a particular culture's "secondary theory" draw their key analogies from a domain in which the audience's "primary theory" generates order, regularity and predictability in their daily lives. The very simplicity of both these metaphors (scaffolding, layers) makes one suspicious of their adequacy for ordering the very complex domains at which they are being directed. Their survival power may well have more to do with the ease with which they are communicated to a Western 20th century audience (or even 17th century, if we are to believe Susan Bordo's account of the "flight to objectivity") than with their capacity to capture the central features of their target domains.

Horton's and some other ideas about what makes some metaphors more viable in psychological theory than others at a particular point in the history of a given culture are discussed and documented in my article in the QNLCHC (12,3) last year.

Robert

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**3.19. Date: Fri, 23 Aug 1991 14:57:19 +0000**

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From: Alfred Lang <lang@psy.unibe.ch>  
Subject: More archeology of layerism (120 lines)  
To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet

An essay in the archeology of layerism.

The German edition of Vygotsky 1934 has a reference to Kretschmer 1950 (Medizinische Psychologie; crazy kind of referencing!). This book is from the early twenties, I have the 2nd, "only in detail modified" edition of 1922 at hand. It has been translated to English as of 1934 (A Text-book of medical psychology. Oxford U. Press, according to a citation in Corsini) and has seen many edition until the 60ies. So, if it is Mediz.Psychol., it possibly may have been a German reading of Vyg, although a Russian translation could have been made before. There is a peculiar, but then no uncommon copyright notice, all rights preserved, yet

especially preserving Russian translation; the Sovjets had not signed the Berne Convention, as far as I know.

Vyg quotes Kre to relay consense of several authors in that a certain mode of thinking (of children, of primary process in the sense of psychoanalysis and "complex thinking of primitive people"; and, from context it must be clear, sorts of pathological thinking in adults, too) to be a "bildhaftes Vorstadium im Prozess der Begriffsbildung" (imagelike antestadium in the process of concept formation). There is one single index entry to "seelische Schichtenbildung", but on that page 53 there is only indirect reference to the idea, because we are already in particulars. However, there is a 50 pages introductory chapter, entitled Die Seele und ihre Entwicklungsgeschichte (Mind and its developmental history), and this is rather interesting, in a Vyg perspective as well as for the history of many things, among them the science of psychology..

Seele is "die Welt als Erlebnis (the world as experience). The sum of things, seen under a particular point of view." Then there the polarizations of Ego and Outer World and the related but not quite identical one of mattere and mind. All experience evolves (entspinnt sich, spider metaphor) from mutual effects (interactions, we would say) between Ego and Outer World: imaging (Abbildung) and expression (Ausdruck) processes, and in addition, affectivity.

OK, but then, there is better and lesser Seele. As to developmental history p. 13-51) there is first reference natural science and then to

### **3.20. Date: Fri, 23 Aug 1991 15:05:03 +0000**

From: Alfred Lang <lang@psy.unibe.ch>  
Subject: More archeology of layerism  
To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet

Sorry for the garbage produced by true quotations with our great Umlaute. Here once more, hopefully in entirety, my

An essay in the archeology of layerism.

The German edition of Vygotsky 1934 has a reference to Kretschmer 1950 (Medizinische Psychologie; crazy kind of referencing!). This book is from the early twenties, I have the 2nd, "only in detail modified" edition of 1922 at hand. It has been translated to English as of 1934 (A Text-book of medical psychology. Oxford U. Press, according to a citation in Corsini) and has seen many edition until the 60ies. So, if it is Mediz.Psychol., it possibly may have been a German reading of Vyg, although a Russian translation could have been made before. There is a peculiar, but then no uncommon copyright notice, all rigths preserved, yet especially preserving Russian translation; the Sovjets had not signed the Berne Convention, as far as I know.



Vyg quotes Kre to relay consense of several authors in that a certain mode of thinking (of children, of primary process in the sense of psychoanalysis and "complex thinking of primitive people"; and, from context it must be clear, sorts of pathological thinking in adults, too) to be a "bildhaftes Vorstadium im Prozess der Begriffsbildung" (imagelike antestadium in the process of concept formation). There is one single index entry to "seelische Schichtenbildung", but on that page 53 there is only indirect reference to the idea, because we are already in particulars. However, there is a 50 pages introductory chapter, entitled Die Seele und ihre Entwicklungsgeschichte (Mind and its developmental history), and this is rather interesting, in a Vyg perspective as well as for the history of many things, among them the science of psychology..

Seele is "die Welt als Erlebnis (the world as experience). The sum of things, seen under a particular point of view." Then there the polarizations of Ego and Outer World and the related but not quite identical one of mattere and mind. All experience evolves (entspinnt sich, spider metaphor) from mutual effects (interactions, we would say) between Ego and Outer World: imaging (Abbildung) and expression (Ausdruck) processes, and in addition, affectivity.

OK, but then, there is better and lesser Seele. As to developmental history p. 13-51) there is first reference natural science and then to Voelkerpsychologie in the Wundtian version which differentiates between "Weltbild of primitive peoples" and ours. Thematized are the transition between animal and unorganized tribe (Horde), totemism, taboos, gods and heroes and humanity, restricted national ones and world wide universal ones, all seen in linear progression, as was the prevalent ideology of the time. (In Merligen at the Boesch Symposium, Martin Mller from Humboldt University will have a paper on that culture concept and its influence on science and politics.) In particular he investigates the 3 stages of animistic, religious, and scientific Weltbild, which is just a simpler tri-partition of the same progression.

Vyg's theme is elaborated in a section entitled the "development of imaging processe" (imaging here is meant to be general, embracing images and languages), which speaks of agglutination (this same term in German) of images, referring to hieroglyphic systems, with 5 figures, from various cultures, and referring to Freuds concepts of condensation and displacement, which have obviously been taken over by Vyg 1934 in section XVII of chapter 5, and to Preuss' concept of komplexes Denken. The Vyg footnote quotation is in this editon on page 22 and has obviously been taken from the German original in the German edition of Akademieverlag of 1964, with the significant exception of the suppression of the adjective "primitive" in the phrase: this (p.) mode of thinking. The term "Komplex" is, like layer a little later, also a favourite of this time. The reference to Preuss, K.Th.: (1914) Die geistige Kultur der Naturvoelker. Leipzig, Teubner, 112 pp. Besides Freud and Preuss and some examples obviously taken from secondary literature, there are no other authors cited in this connection by Kretschmer. What Vyg qualifies as (from the German footnote) "all authors agree" on this mode of thinking

as an image-like antestadium of concepts is, in fact, nothing more than a quite general prejudice of the epoch, welcome in an era of promising colonialism with scientist replacing missionaries as voluntary fig-leaves in expeditions. The prejudice has in vain been fought against since before 1910 by psychologists like Erich von Hornbostel or Max Wertheimer or Carl Stumpf.

The prejudice is, highly simplified, the fiction of a linear progression of all evolution, bio-, onto-, and cultural towards the higher, better, clear, distinct, necessary etc. This is one of the darker sides of enlightenment. It was very hard, indeed, to evade in an epoch of scientifically based social and cultural amok.

I am not in a position to judge the import of this culture-evaluation prejudice on the Vygotsky school as a whole and until today. Obviously Diamat as well as Nazi ideology are not immune against it, although, maybe, for different reasons. As far as I know Vygotsky (and I cannot read Russian and haven't seen all English translations available) he does not appear to explicitly promote the culture-evaluation prejudice; however his thesis of abstract thinking and language being an all embracing tool is a little biased at least, although he needs a metaphor to express it clearly enough -- consciousness reflected in words like the sun in a water droplet (last paragraph in 1934).

Of my few contacts with Russian psychologists, some at least are quite reserved as to the future of this "school" and can express this now. Activity theory, in my opinion, by its emphasis on voluntary goal concepts, runs this risk of the same trap. However, this should not divert from the great merits of Vyg and his followers in bringing culture into psychology.

### **3.21. Date: Fri, 23 Aug 1991 15:09:14 +0000**

From: Alfred Lang <lang@psy.unibe.ch>  
Subject: last 3 paragr. to archeology  
To: xlhc@ucsd.BitNet

PS: I have, in addition, checked the 1st edition of *Koerperbau and Charakter* of 1921. It has no index, probably no mention of Schichten, because everything is "horizontal", differentiating types of people, not developmental stages.

Mike, I send this to xlhc because of its possible general science history interest. More and directly on your draft later.

Everybody, please note, that this should not be read as a political statement, it might be misunderstood as such, I see in re-reading it. I do not intend to hurt anybody, dead or living. I want to discuss ideas. And I believe that they cannot be adequately discussed if removed from their culture-historical context. In this, I hope, I am enough of a Vygotskyan.

there was another one of those oe's in Voelkerpsychologie, sorry.

[next AL message](#)

### **3.22. Date: Fri, 23 Aug 91 08:22:59 pdt**

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
Subject: medical kretschmer  
To: xlhc@ucsd.edu

Thanks greatly for tracking down Kretschmer and Vygotsky from the perspective of a German psychologist, Alfred! I will check out the Kretschmer. Your description of Seele in history sounds very interesting.

mike

### **3.23. Date: Sat, 24 Aug 91 10:23 EDT**

From: SERPELL <SERPELL@UMBC>  
Subject: voluntary fig-leafs  
To: xlhc@ucsd

Alfred Lang writes (Aug 23):

"... What Vyg qualifies as (from the German footnote) "all authors agree" on this mode of thinking as an image-like antestadium of concepts is, in fact, nothing more than a quite general prejudice of the epoch, welcome in an era of promising colonialism with scientist replacing missionaries as voluntary fig-leafs in expeditions. The prejudice has in vain been fought against since before 1910 by psychologists like Erich von Hornbostel or Max Wertheimer or Carl Stumpf.

The prejudice is, highly simplified, the fiction of a linear progression of all evolution, bio-, onto-, and cultural towards the higher, better, clear, distinct, necessary etc. This is one of the darker sides of enlightenment. It was very hard, indeed, to evade in an epoch of scientifically based social and cultural amok.

I am not in a position to judge the import of this culture-evaluation prejudice on the Vygotsky school as a whole and until today. Obviously Diamat as well as Nazi ideology are not immune against it, although, maybe, for different reasons. As far as I know Vygotsky (and I cannot read Russian and haven't seen all English translations available) he does not appear to explicitly promote the culture-evaluation prejudice; however his thesis of abstract thinking and language being an all embracing tool is a little biased at least, although he needs a metaphor to express it clearly enough -- consciousness reflected in words like the sun in a water droplet (last paragraph in 1934)."

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This constitutes a more critical account than that offered by the late Sylvia Scribner in her widely acclaimed "Vygotsky's uses of history". I wonder what the other Vygotsky pundits out there on xlchc think about this.

I wonder also about the range of application of the entertaining metaphor of the scientist as a voluntary fig-leaf for prejudice in colonial expeditions. Does it for instance apply to Luria's speculations about the cognitive requirements of syllogistic reasoning in the Uzbekistan and Kazakstan "expedition" ?

One of the points often made by historians about the role of the Christian church in Africa during the early 20th century is that its position was ambiguous. At times it seemed more hostile to the indigenous cultural ways of life than the colonial politicians, and at other times more sympathetic, suggesting that its representatives regretted their apparent fig-leaf role and sought to define a separate stance. Maybe that is what scientists like Vygotsky were busy trying to do as they struggled to define what "all <scientific> authors agree" as distinct from "popular belief", "the party and its government's position", etc. ?

intrigued...Robert

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### **3.24. Date: Sun, 25 Aug 91 17:42:25 pdt**

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
Subject: cross-cult/cross-hist  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

It seems to me that very important issues are being raised by Alfred Lang and Bob Serpell stemming from my earlier inquiry about the use of geological metaphors of mind. As I hoped they would be.

However, it is not clear to me how to proceed with a discussion. As a way of temporizing, let me list some relevant writing on this topic that I have been trying to get my mind around:

- 1) Jim Wertsch's book, *Voices of the mind*, which contrasts heterogeneity of thought with and without genetic hierarchy.
- 2) Peeter Tulviste's book on culture and verbal thinking which defends a non-hierarchical interpretation of Levy-Bruhl. In this book, soon to be published by Nova in English, Peeter interprets my relativistic stance as liberal romanticism. An article by Peeter reporting some of his cross-cultural research on syllogistic reasoning appears in the LCHC Newsletter a few years ago.
- 3) The LCHC summary articles of 1982 and 1983 in *Handbooks* by Sternberg and Mussen in which we argue for the primacy of context specificity and "conditional relativism."
- 4) A recent book by Karl Ratner which criticizes LCHC work over the years for its inconsistency and relativism.
- 5) Anyone interested in this discussion ought also to read Luria's *Nature of Human Conflicts*, last section and the upcoming Van der Veer and Valsiner book on Vygotsky, where this issue is discussed. And, I guess, my introduction to Luria's book on *Cognitive Development* and his own interpretation of the data in the early 1970's ought to be consulted.

Its an awful lot to summarize, which is why I am puzzled about how to proceed. Perhaps a set of parallel seminars held over the fall on xlchc or a subgroup of it?

Finally, Evgenii Subbotski and I are attempting to write a paper on this topic of Alfred which provides one take on the issues. A draft of that paper should be ready in a couple of weeks (the deadline is Sept 1) at which time we can send it to interested parties.

If anyone has a better way to proceed I will be interested in following along.

mike

### **3.25. Date: Mon, 26 Aug 91 20:01 EDT**

From: "Tom Benson 814-865-4201" <T3B@PSUVM.PSU.EDU>  
Subject: layering / trees  
To: XLCHC@UCSD.EDU

This is just a leap in the dark . . . at the same time that Mike C. raised the issue of layering as a metaphor, a discussion of trees as a metaphor for linguistic development/textual decay turned up on another list, HUMANIST@BROWNVM (and this at a time when I am trying to make sense, again, of the history of a field called "communication(s)" and the tricks that knowledge trees can play in the academic mono/dia-logue).

Is it, Mike, that you are raising the notion of layering per se, or as part of a larger curiosity about the commonsense metaphors that shape cognition/culture/science?

Tom Benson

Penn State t3b@psuvm.psu.edu

### **3.26. Date: Mon, 26 Aug 91 20:21:35 pdt**

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)

Subject: trees for- us(t)

To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Tom- I would be very grateful if you would forward me parts of the tree metaphor discussion from HUMANIST.

You ask, am I raising the notion of layering per se, or as part of a larger curiosity about commensense metaphors that shape cognition/ culture science.

My answer is (natch!) dual. I came to UCSD in part because I was pretty\ certain that my ideas could not be accomodated within psychology as it has been constituted in the 20th century and became an instrument for the creation of a Communication (no "s") department. Wearing that hat (in part to avoid cancer of the scalp no doubt) I am VERY interested in the branching of human knowledge and the particular role that the discipline of communication fulfills in that scenario.

At the same time I am the product of mid 20th century positivist, behaviorist psychology, and as I try to think myself out of the boxes I crawled into I have found myself become a developmentalist and from that perspective the the layering metaphors are non-trivial, even if they are flawed (as Alfred Lang has argued).

One of the really fascinating things about Communication as a perspective from which to observe and participate in the current flow is that it is possible to take discussions of metaphor/discourse/voices, etc. both very seriously and critically. It affords participation in BOTH the social sciences and humanities (aka the humane sciences). AND, it affords seeing parallel discussions in different dukedoms that ought to be interacting/conversing, gossiping, yakking away, etc.

So, are the humanists catching up with Steve Gould in his criticism of the branching/widening visual metaphor of evolution, or do they have a different, perhaps deeper, appreciation of these issues?

mike

**3.27. Date: Mon, 26 Aug 91 22:52 MDT**

From: NAVAJO@unmb.unm.edu  
Subject: LAYERS & SCAFFOLDING VS. MOVEMENT (forwarding)  
To: XLCHC@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

My name is Maia Cramer, and I am a student of Vera John-Steiner's at the University of New Mexico. We have been discussing the recent series of VAXmail messages regarding "geology," "layers," scaffolding," and the like. Within the contexts of your dialogue and of ours, the following notions occurred to me, and Vera suggested that I send them on to you. I look forward to continued elaborated discussions. Ahe'hee!

(Many thanks)

Maia Cramer  
Educational Foundations  
College of Education  
University of New Mexico  
VAXmail: IN%"NAVAJO@UNMB.BITNET"  
gMAIL: NAVAJO@UNMB.BITNET

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From: UNMB::NAVAJO 14-AUG-1991 12:59  
To: VYGOTSKY  
Subj: LAYERS & SCAFFOLDING VS. MOVEMENT

As I read through the "geology" and "scaffolding" mail, I am struck by the object-orientedness of it. As long as we use object-like metaphors, how will we begin to think about thinking and the development of thinking in more fluid terms. In other words, my hunch is that object metaphors prevent us from thinking in terms of movement (thinking in Navajo instead of English, for example).

Clearly, movement can occur within the space between objects; but let us begin to look at what is happening in that space rather than focussing upon the objects themselves. Carrying the Navajo metaphor further (maybe right off the edge of the limb and into the space), while it is important (critical) to apprehend the nature of objects (round, straight, loose and floppy, etc.), it is also required to recognize and to enfold the nature of the movement (does it move of its own accord, is there some external agency at work, etc.).

Now, if we think in terms of thinking as the movement rather than the object, then "old" knowledge (Paleozoic?) becomes important not because of its nature but rather because of the ways in which it moves toward "new" knowledge (Cenozoic?). What are those ways? I don't know, but as one of the lchc-ers pointed out, boundary establishment and contained chaos (ala "chaos" theory) suggests a possible way of going at this.

What do you think? Or, should I ask, HOW do you think?

### **3.28. Date: Tue, 27 Aug 91 09:26:56 pdt**

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
Subject: Alternative formulations  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Maia-

Thinking in terms of relationships rather than entities is very much a part of modern psychological thought, but it does seem to be difficult/awkward for English speakers (at least). An example that has appeared in xlchc is the concept of teaching as it relates to the concept of learning in school settings. In English these are separate terms, as a rule. In Russian a single term can be used to refer to both, which has led some, like myself, to refer to teaching/learning.

What would be helpful would be for you to present an example with respect to old/new, early/late modes of thinking where a reformulation in relational/Navaho terms brings to light an important phenomenon that has been obscured heretofore. Do you have something in mind?

mikec

### **3.29. Date: Wednesday, 28 August 1991 1:01am ET**

From: "Antonio.Bettencourt" <21600AB@MSU.BitNet>  
Subject: PLATE TECTONICS OF THE SOUL  
To: xlchc@ucsd.bitnet

First a very interesting reference that may have something to do with all this (or it may not). Shapin, S. & Barnes, B. (1976). Head and hand: rhetorical resources in British pedagogical writing 1770-1850. *Oxford Review of Education*, 2(3), 231-254. The first part talks about 'mental types' as they were used to characterize inferior and superior mentalities (I need not tell who were ones and the others). Question: Is this layer metaphor/analogy/simile a projection back and forth of power and class structures into 'scientific' ways of thinking?

I think that in *Thought and Language*, Vygotsky speaks something about theoretical constructs by being used out of their initial contexts, reveal their ideological (in the classical sense of 'reality distortions') origins and purposes. If my memory of Vyg is correct (or close) does all this layer stuff in psychology reveal that already in Geology it had suspect ancestry? Could seventeenth to nineteenth century (formational period of Geology) men think in other terms?

There seems to be an assumption that the only geological processes of interest for psychology are processes of sedimentation. Question: Can we speculate what



are the analogues of gravimetric sedimentation, chemical sedimentation and biological sedimentation? What about sort of strange sediments like criss-crossed sandstones? Or is psychology only interested in the lithographic limestones of Solenhofen where even the feathers of the Archaeopteryx are preserved?

Sedimentary rocks are secondary, they are formed from previous rocks. Questions: Any place for weathering, alteration and erosion in psychological domains?

There are also other kinds of rocks like igneous and metamorphic: Any analogues for intrusive rocks, extrusive rocks, volcanism, foliation, recrystallization, etc? (Were now into bulk, beyond layers)

Finally, The rock cycle, Any analogues for anatexis, the process by which sedimentary rocks are at great depths transformed back into granites?

All the above is old geology, and probably the people that used the metaphor in the turn of the century were not concerned about taking it to (geo)logical extremes.

What about plate tectonics, those large blocks that move, go under, erupt here and there through cracks, spreading seafloors, trenches, subsiding zones, faults, earthquakes. Sounds like the pop descriptions of Freud's conception of unconscious and subconscious...

A last question: What was the rhetorical function of this metaphor(s)? Who was persuading whom about what?

A question after the last: What made all these lay(er) to rest?

Antonio.

### **3.30. Date: Wed, 28 Aug 1991 12:26:24 +0000**

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From: Alfred Lang <lang@psy.unibe.ch>  
Subject: scaffolding, layers, etc. 60 lines  
To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet

When following up the recent discussion about scaffolding, prolepsis etc. an example of "teaching/learning" or rather "development" came to my mind that certainly also has to do with layers. And I would very much like to hear from Vygotsky etc. specialists, how they think it relates to scaffolding, how it fits in the goal oriented activity and developmental theories. I don't know whether you prefer to see the example as layerophobe or layerophil, that depending probably more on your predilections as to importance of "deeper" or "higher" layers (just to combine horizontal and vertical imagery) rather than on the process.

The example is from a Swiss musicologist named Andreas Gutzwiller (*Die Shakuhachi der Kinko-Schule*. Basel-London, Baerenreiter, 1983; his Ph.D. is from Wesleyan 1974, he has also an English article in *Ethnomusicology* 23(1) 103-107 in 1979; and there is a CD Jecklin 588-2: *Der wahre Geist der Leere*, Andreas Fuyu Gutzwiller, Shakuhachi). He has reached a very high rank among shakuhachi players in Japan, and in his book he relates largely about instruction. He calls it imitatory instruction. It consists exclusively in master and student playing together every day for a couple of years. There is absolutely no reflection, no explanation, no criticism, no correction, no reward, verbal or otherwise, nothing. They just play together, unisono, sitting opposite each other, the sensei reading the sheet upside down, if necessary. If it doesn't work, they might eventually part or meet only occasionally, but hard to say how this is decided. If it works the student will play with the master and other at collective or even public occasions and eventually given a rank. The bond between the two is lifelong.

As a Westerner G., of course, went through all kinds of inner turmoils, the accent is on "through", but it takes some time, indeed. Sensei "ignores" all the time, the student doesn't even know whether on purpose or by neglect. They play no etudes, just the few dozen or so pieces of the school. The (Western) student asks the teacher to correct his obviously wrong posture of the hand ã that doesn't matter, is all what sensei says. Later on, probably in the process of becoming a teacher, sensei admits that he had done well to abandon that posture, but then he had been a beginner, and that posture was OK then.

Someday the student (the Western student writing a book about this, at least) will judge himself the quality of the play, perhaps understands that, in fact, he taught and teaches himself. The result of the common action seems to be something truly admirable. The good student will become a true member of the school, and this in a completely personal way. And, I emphasize, this, to me, is superb development: becoming a member of of culture in a complete personal manner. The designation "imitatory" is superficial if not simply wrong.

And so on, highly commendable reading! There are many more details in an excellent description bridging two cultures (double sense, I think).

Scaffolding or not? In what respect yes, in what no? Process(es) in which layer(s)? Which layer, if so, leading or following which one? Layers at all? Sure, there are sign systems, a multitude of them, in dialectical interplay, some more stable (the school, sensei?), some softer, changing, finding, losing, finding anew, pregnancy. Some within each person, some shared between them or, better, proper to the pair, some reaching far beyond, in traditions, from past to future, etc. -- But no words. What is the tool? -- Strange, eh? I should like to have comments of xlhcers, Vygotskyans or not.

Bye --- Alfred

Mittwoch, 28. August 1991 14:25 Uhr

Alfred Lang  
Psychol.Inst., Univ. Bern, Switzerland  
Laupenstrasse 4, CH-3008 BERN  
e-mail: lang@psy.unibe.ch

[next AL message](#)

### **3.31. Date: Wednesday, 28 August 1991 3:28pm ET**

From: "Antonio.Bettencourt" <21600AB@MSU.BitNet>  
Subject: Alfred Lang's Message  
To: xlchc@ucsd.bitnet

The message reminded me of two completely unrelated things. There is a professor here at MSU who did her dissertation work in Northern China (She is American) and while there attended a brush painting class. Her experience in this class is very similar to what Alfred relates about the musician in Japan.

The second thing is the little tale of Jorge Luis Borges called the writing of the God. This wonderful piece is to me an allegory of total understanding. Some of the sentiments of the high priest when he finally understood the writing of the God were similar to the words of the senbsei master. In any case it is wonderful reading

Antonio.

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## 4. Some music 1991: 1 / 2

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### 4.1. Date: 91-08-18 15:19:26 MEZ

From: PO61170%DHHUNI4.BITNET@YALEVM.YCC.Yale.Edu  
Subject: Rules and Adventures  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

There is a phenomenon like the fridge door that I would like to discuss here among cultural researchers:

My two sons (16 and 19 years) are playing role-based games which are called "adventures" in spite of the fact that there is no freedom in interpreting the rules -- incredibly complicated, layed down e.g. in complex tables of whom beats whom -- whose "synergy" or "systemic effect" escapes me completely. Simulacra of what, really ?

Searching for the thrill that this pastime evidentially generates when being followed through, I found the joy of keeping inside rule bound domains while producing interesting patterns (see Lia's note in January).

Does any of you know of more disciplined enquiries into this field ?

Arne Raeithel  
U of Hamburg,  
Von-Melle-Park 5  
D-2000 Hamburg 13, FRG

### 4.2. Date: Thu, 22 Aug 1991 17:48:00 +0000

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From: Alfred Lang <lang@psy.unibe.ch>  
Subject: D&D;, flow, music  
To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet

Referring to Don Norman's D&D; addendum as to the "flow aspect of games that makes them so compelling" I just wanted to add, that the purest flow artifact, of course, is music. When you play yourself, ehen you play with others, and experience flow discrepencies, and even when you listen to music, you have expecttions and deviations in time and many other dimensions.

And a question do Don: is the Csikszentmihalyi 1990 book, you mention, a new one or a revision of his 1975 book on flow? It didn't come yet under my eyes. Thanks for a hint.

Alfred

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## 5. Prolepsis 1991: 1 / 3

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### 5.1. Date: Wed, 28 Aug 91 10:02:16 pdt

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
Subject: prolepsis by another name?  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Following the advice of xlchc-ers I have obtained Rommetveit and Blakar's \*Studies of language, thought, and verbal communication\* (Academic Press, 1979). I take the most relevant chapter to be "On the architecture of intersubjectivity" and the section on "anticipatory comprehension." Rommetveit says that the starting point for this discussion is the work of hermeneutic philosophers of language who use the term, "Vorverstandigung." Might our German-speaking colleagues help me out with the relation between "vorverstandigung" and "prolepsis?" Are their semantic fields the same or only overlapping?

The major point being made by Rommetviet, if I understand him, is that anticipatory comprehension is necessary the initial, pre- established, shared lifeworld which constitutes the essential "given" to which further talk contributes a possible "new."

Correct?

mike

### 5.2. Date: Wed, 28 Aug 91 10:21:53 pdt

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
Subject: prolepsis-an example  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

In his article in J. Wertsch (ed.), Culture, communication and cognition, Rommetveit quotes Newson as follows:

someone who is trying to communicate with an infant ... is bound to respond selectively to precisely those actions, on the part of the baby, to which one would normally respond \*\*given the assumption that the baby is like any other communicating person

(p. 188 in the Wertsch volume)

It take this to be an excellent example of prolepsis. It also bears strikingly on the following remark of Rommetveit's" \*Intersubjectivity must in some sense be taken for granted in order to be attained.\*

Applied to adult talk to children I take this to mean that for a child to come to understand language the adult must in some sense take for granted that the child understands what it cannot in fact understand.

mikec

### 5.3. Date: Wed, 28 Aug 1991 19:45:10 +0000

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From: Alfred Lang <lang@psy.unibe.ch>  
Subject: Prolepsis - Vorverstaendnis  
To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet

Just from my personal linguistic guts with a little support of Duden (equivalent to Webster or the like):

"Vorverstaendigung" is awkward, not a usable word, sounds rather hand-made.

One ordinary word, but farther away from your point of interest, it seems, would be "Vorausverstaendigung" which means, you have attained coordination with somebody on something of common interest, e.g. before an official meeting, you can rely on those others with whom you have made "Vorausverstaendigung"; the point is, you have actively arranged an (now tacit) agreement.

The one, Rommetveit presumably refers to ( if not verbatim then in sense, I cannot check in his text) is more probably "Vorverstaendnis", which is nearer to what you can assume the other knows about a matter of common interest. It is more what he/she knows anyway, you must not necessarily, although you might have arranged, it can be his general or specific knowledge about things. In a wide sense, it refers to all what you assume while talking that the other will or should bring in as context without you have to say it. "Vorverstaendnis" is context knowledge, it is implicit.

"Prolepsis", on the other hand is much more actually situation specific and explicit. It has the character of a prompt or forewarning: this one is incomplete, the rest you will need for understanding me follows shortly.

The point is more of controlling attention than of assuming content.

So there is not much if any shared meaning.

Hope it helps ---- Alfred

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## 6. Primates 1991: 1 / 18

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### 6.1. Date: Tue, 8 Oct 1991 08:26:29 -0800

From: norman@cogsci.ucsd.edu (Don Norman)  
Subject: Symbolic thought  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Preface:

I have followed the discussions on XLCHC about the nature of symbolic thought with interest and frustration. This discussion coincides with my own struggles to put together a coherent story. I am trying to finish a book (Norman, in preparation) and I find that my own ideas were badly defined and ill-structured. I have recently begun to formulate a new synthesis of the material, however, greatly aided by a number of new studies of children, primates, and human intelligence.

Let me try to summarize these arguments here. In some sense, this summary is as much as for my benefit as it might be for yours. Writing it has helped me organize my own thoughts considerably (another example of the power of external representation in human thought).

I must also say that I was triggered by the really excellent analysis that Phil Davidson provided of the Piagetian approach to the study of intelligence, based upon a framework of sensori-motor integration. Phil made a complex topic clear, but also clear enough that it revealed to me my own dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs in Cognitive Science about the nature of intelligence. By "current state" I mean the establishment view, a view that, I like to believe, is rapidly evolving. Phil's example prompted me to try to provide this one. I fear it will not be as clear or coherent.

So, let me begin. Warning: this message is far too brief to do a decent job. Nonetheless, it will strike you, the reader, as extremely long for e-mail (it is over 2,500 words).

The symbol \*xxx\* means that the words enclosed by the \*s were in italics in the original. Full references to all citations are given at the end of this message.

Don Norman

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First, to start with Piaget. His view of how intelligence develops is far from being accepted.: I urge those interested to read the new book by Scott Atran (1990). This deserves to be an important book.

To see how Atran enters the Piagetian debate, consider this quote from the preface:

"For the profit of people -- like myself who were perplexed by the issue of universals, I conceived a debate between Noam Chomsky and Jean Piaget. ... (See Royaumont Center, 1980). As the discussion unfolded I came to think that Chomsky was, in the main right and Piaget wrong: no logical or empirical grounds supported the claim that the innate and universal foundations of human thinking reduce to an undifferentiated intelligence, which is responsible in the same way for all cognitive operations.

"Why, indeed, make the *\*a priori\** assumption that all, or even some, of the interesting (i.e., species-specific) domains of human knowledge and experience are structured alike? It is hardly plausible that the rich and diverse sorts of adult mental competence are induced, learned or constructed by general procedures from the poor and fragmentary experiences of childhood. More likely, there are a variety of fairly well-articulated modes of human thinking -- inherently differentiated components of human nature acquired over millions of years of biological and cognitive evolution." (Atran, 1990, pp. ix-x.)

In the book itself, Atran argues that there exists a rather spontaneous and steadfast acquisition of "common sense" that governs our folk classifications of the world and, thereby our scientific understanding. Science builds upon this, so that folk knowledge shapes science, but in turn, "science scarcely affects ordinary thinking about customary matters."

I am still working my way through the book: I think it provocative, but I still am maintaining an open mind. I have not yet digested the full message he is providing. My reading so far (which may be badly distorted) is that Atran wants to show how common sense provides a basis for both folk and scientific classification and analysis systems, and that these are, therefore, somewhat arbitrary and imposed upon us as much as by the information structures of the mind as by the structures of the world.

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Now let us turn to the debate about the nature of intelligence and the role of symbolic thought. it turns out that there are many different levels of intelligence that we must distinguish among. Symbols may not be necessary at the lower levels, but they most definitely are at higher ones. I believe that the recent developments in the study of animal intelligence offer a richer approach (see the very nice summaries: Cheney & Seyfarth, 1990; Whiten, 1991). Monkeys may or may not use

symbols. Chimps certainly do. Chimps (and the developing infant?) may not, however, have a composable representational system. Humans certainly do.

Basically, these books review the recent developments in the studies of social competence of monkeys, apes, and children and argue for a layered analysis of mental sophistication.

Here is my opinion of what has been learned. Traditional theories of human cognition, including my own prior work, is primarily perceptually based. It is an analysis of what I now call "responsive" intelligence (to be distinguished from "reflective intelligence"). Thus, traditional studies follow a path of analysis from perception to memory to classification to intention to action. Even theories of problem solving and decision making are responsive in that they assume a well-stated, well-formed problem with a goal, a clear set of operators, and a problem-state that is explored by the agent. All of this work has studied the human in what Cicourel (1991: unpublished notes) has called "the white room": a cleaned-up, controlled environment. This makes for good science, but it restricts the phenomena being studied.

Primate research quickly moved away from the white room conditions of laboratories and zoos toward naturalistic observations. There, the behavior seemed much richer: monkeys lied to one another, deliberately misleading conspecifics. Initially, this led to complex interpretations of their mental states: When away from the controlled environment of the white room, it is difficult to know what factors contribute to the behavior.

But today, primatologists and child developmentalists (who face the very same experimental problems and theoretical issues) have learned how to combine the naturalistic studies with controlled observations. And we have developed richer analytical tools.

A standard analytical procedure, today, is to use Dennett's (1983, 1987) analysis of knowledge states (intentional states). Let us begin with monkeys (example, vervets and baboons) and contrast them with apes (chimps and the great apes). It turns out there are significant differences in the abilities of monkeys, apes, and humans, but differences that would not show up if one just studied traditional cognitive tasks (e.g., problem solving, classification, or memory). It shows up in social interactions and, especially, deceit.

Now, to the story.

A vervet monkey (e.g., Kitui in Chapter 8 of Cheney & Seyfarth) wants to scare away the dominant male monkey, so it gives the "Leopard alarm." The rival obligingly flees.

I used the term "wants to scare": How can I be justified in this? This implies that Kitui knows the situation, has a goal, knows that the other monkey knows that the leopard alarm means danger, and therefore knows that if it sounds the leopard alarm, the other monkey will flee. In other words, this interpretation means that \*the vervet has a theory of the other vervet's mind.\* Such a theory requires a symbol system that allows the vervet to represent the knowledge of the other monkey and base its actions on that knowledge.

A behaviorist would say, "nonsense. Kitui has experienced that producing the leopard cry results in the other monkeys departure. Simple association. No theory of mind at all. No symbols at all."

Cheney & Seyfarth try a number of controlled experiments to try to disentangle these interpretations. For this situation alone, it is very difficult to get conclusive evidence about the internal state of an animal's (or person's) mind.

Suppose, for the moment, though, that you accept that the vervet might have a primitive symbol system and, thereby, a primitive theory of mind. But note -- what kind of theory of mind does Kitui have? it turns out to be pretty meager. Kitui strolls casually through the brush crying "Leopard! Leopard!" while other monkeys flee for the trees. As Jolly said in his review of the book, it is as if a child denied eating cookies while its face was covered with cooky crumbs.

Kitui is too stupid to act the part. Fortunately, the other vervets are similarly stupid: they don't realize that the person crying "Leopard" should also act afraid. So Kitui's deception works.

So, at best, Kitui has LEVEL ONE theory of mind.

Note that a chimp could not get away with Kitui's behavior: A chimp would have to act scared while calling "Leopard": thus, a chimp's theory of mind includes not only a theory of the other chimps, but also the knowledge of what the other chimps might know of its own mind

Vervets can only pass stage 1: I know that you respond X to Y. Chimps can do more: I know that you know that I will respond X to Y.

Monkeys are not nearly as good as the apes in this deception business. And Chimps are not as good as children, who in turn are not as good as adults. It takes a lot of intelligence and social expertise to be a good liar.

Cheney & Seyfarth conclude their book with these words: "Though a monkey may make use of abstract concepts and have motives, beliefs and desires, her mental states are not accessible to her: she does not know what she knows. Further, monkeys seem unable to attribute mental states to others or to recognize that others' behavior is also caused by motives, beliefs, and desires.

" ... Though monkeys are skilled observers of each others' \*behavior,\* they seem to be far less astute observers of each others' \*minds,\* and they seldom seem to proceed beyond other animals' actions to analyze their motives underlying their behavior. We attribute motives, plans, and strategies to the animals, but they, for the most part, do not." (p. 312).

Note, by the way, one of the implications of having knowledge of one's own mind, but not of the minds of others: deceit is easier than cooperation. There is strikingly little evidence for planned cooperative behavior, including lack of evidence for instructional tutoring in even the apes: hence, most studies concentrate on deception. I think this is because the knowledge levels required for deception are simpler than those of cooperation. Deception serves self-interest whereas cooperation serves mutual interest. And if apes have a better understanding of their own minds than the minds of others, deceit would be easier than cooperation. As an example, apes do appear to show grief at the loss of a child, but they do not appear to understand the grief that another ape shows at the loss of its child.

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I contend that contemporary theories of cognition are essentially like that of the vervet monkey: they tell us about knowledge states and beliefs, but they do not go beyond.

In what way is human intelligence superior to that of the Ape? Note that genetically, the chimp and human are almost identical. Their brain structures are extremely similar. There seems no obvious biological explanation for the vast difference in performance. I now believe that is because the differences have to do with levels of representation, of the human's ability to think about their own mental representations, to manipulate them, and to modify them. Once you can manipulate your own internal representations as if they were external objects, then huge computational power is available. Newell (1991) argues that it is the requirement for a \*composable\* representation system that provides the power of human intelligence.

Composable. See, just having representations isn't enough. Just having symbols isn't enough: you have to be able to work with them, to recombine them, to construct new representations. Chimps can't do that. Young children probably cannot. Humans? Well, in limited fashion.

In his very important new study, Merlin Donald (1991) argues that human evolution has proceeded through several critical stages. In particular, it moved from having just representations (what he calls "episodic memory" -- and what chimps have) to mimetic representations, then mythic. Mimetic means using mimes of actions as a signalling system. A non-verbal language. Want a banana: mime the act of eating one. Chimps are barely at this level of behavior: the evidence is controversial. Humans find it natural.

Mythic structure is the typing together of themes, of stories. Folk tales, religious epics. This can be started prior to language. Language, of course, becomes a powerful tool for both mimetic and mythic behavior.

But to go beyond, says Donald, the human is very limited by its biological apparatus. Here is where Donald departs from the traditional studies of cognition in the most important way. Basically, he says that the traditional view tries to explain human intelligence solely within the information processing structures of the head. This idea, says Donald, is wrong.

"Humans do not think complex thoughts exclusively in working memory, at least not in working memory as traditionally defined; it is far too limited and unstable. In modern human culture, people engaged in a major thought project virtually \*always\* employ external symbolic material. .. They use their biological working memory system, along with their perceptual apparatus, more as an iterative data-crunching device, or a processor of visual analog images." (p. 329).

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Let me conclude.

There are many different levels of thought processes. The existence of symbol systems and representational systems is necessary for reflective, constructive thought. This requires a compositional representational medium and the ability to construct models of the knowledge structures and beliefs and motives of others. The requirements of human intelligence, however, has outstripped out biological capabilities, and are thereby fundamentally linked to our abilities to construct and use artifacts that extend our capabilities.

There has been very little study of the reflective nature of thought, of the ability to know another's mind, of the ability to know one's own mind, and then, of the ability to overcome one's own limitations.

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## 6.2. Date: Wed, 9 Oct 91 23:57:22 PDT

From: lagache@violet.berkeley.edu (Edouard Lagache)  
Subject: Of deceit and "higher intelligence" (Re: Symbolic thought)  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Hello everyone,

Just a relatively quick observation on Don Norman's insightful and intriguing little essay of a few days ago. I was struck by the example of how it was shown that monkeys have a greater intelligence than "white room experiments" indicated.

While perhaps incidental, I couldn't escape the irony that intelligence was exhibited to: *\*deceive\**. Rather than serving to provide "a more accurate picture of reality" intelligence was exhibited not only to "distort reality", but do so to a social group in order to achieve personal gain.

At one level the result is quite disappointing. Could it be that intelligence, rather than serving to illuminate truth, in fact evolved so that individuals could capitalize on weaknesses of social systems? (by lying)

Pushed to another level the question becomes even more fascinating. After all, one cannot \*choose\* to be truthful and honest unless one has the option of doing the alternative. While I believe all cultures practice lying, I also believe that all cultures have taboos against this at one level or another. Thus, what evolution gave man the ability to do, cultures seek to take away.

Moral issues aside, this is indeed a sign of higher intelligence. If one takes collective subjects (communities) as also evolving, it clearly is in the greater interest of the collective to have faithful communications rather than deceit.

I cannot help but ponder the myths of Adam and Eve and Pandora's box. Both myths have the common theme of "knowing too much being dangerous". . . . . Could their be in those myths was the collective realization that simpler (honest) social structures in the end functioned better than those where deceit operated to benefit a few at the expense of many?

Admittedly nothing more than raw ingrediants. I leave it up to you to mix and bake. . . . or at least ponder.

Edouard

### **6.3. Date: Thu, 10 Oct 91 14:47 MET**

From: ENGELSTED@vax.psl.ku.dk  
Subject: deceit  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Dear Edouard

You ask us to ponder the idea that intelligence has evolved because it serves deceit. If you wish to follow up on your (rather disheartening) idea, you should perhaps look into sociobiology, which actually honored this idea as a basic tenet. See f.example R.L. Trivers: Parental investment and sexual selection, in B. Campbell (ed.): Sexual Selection and the Descent of Man 1871-1971, Aldine Publishing Co., Chicago 1972, p. 136-179. It is a naive understanding of mental evolution, Trivers claims, to believe nervous systems has evolved to give a progressively more accurate picture of the world. On the contrary, the selective advantage has been deceit toward others and toward one self. (Whether this means that Triver's insight is a specimen of self-deceit, is not a question he addresses). Based on Trivers the founding father of sociobiology, E.O. Wilson, in his opus magnum, declares that deceit and hypocrisy is not really bad. On the contrary it is the basis of the extraordinary evolution of the human mind. See E.O. Wilson: Sociobiology. The new Synthesis, Harvard University Press, 1975, p. 553.

Niels Engelsted

**6.4. Date: Thu, 10 Oct 91 08:14:12 -0700**

From: azmitia@cats.UCSC.EDU  
Subject: Re: Of deceit and "higher intelligence" (Re: Symbolic thought)  
To: lagache@violet.berkeley.edu, xlchc@ucsd.edu

Edouard, there is actually a very lively debate going on about the deceitful, political, etc. gains of intelligence that you discussed.

There is a very interesting book, aptly titled Machiavelian Intelligence, edited by Richard Byrne and Andrew Whiten, in which several authors make the argument that the driving force behind the evolution of intelligence was neither tool use nor language, but the need to outwit members of one's social group.

Not very moral, but interesting

Margarita Azmitia  
U.C. Santa Cruz  
azmitia@cats.ucsc.edu

**6.5. Date: Thu, 10 Oct 1991 11:05:44 -0800**

From: norman@cogsci.ucsd.edu (Don Norman)  
Subject: Re: deceit  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Two brief comments on my long note.

1. Deceit versus cooperation. I would not read too much into the fact that all the studies today concentrate upon deceit. There are two reasons for this, in my opinion.

A. Deceit is a lot easier to see. It is more dramatic. Cooperation may occur over longer time periods and be more difficult to study and document.

B. As I said in my note, I think you could argue that the mental structures for deceit are simpler than those required for cooperation. One requires only self-knowledge. The other requires knowledge of the knowledge of others. Perhaps cooperation is at the limit of primate intelligence. Perhaps it is only humans that are capable of deliberate, planned mutual assistance, instruction, and cooperation. Human society schools its children, whether in formal settings as in industrialized society or informally. No animal society does this.

So, don't get so pessimistic about the human race based on simple extrapolation from what has been observed with monkeys and apes.



2. Although my note was long for email, and although I spent about two hours composing it, both the length and the amount of time and effort that went into it were too short for the content. I have already caught several errors of fact, several misstatements and oversimplifications, and a lot of typing errors (even though I used a spelling checker).

I will not issue detailed correctins because, for email, that would be too formal: I believe the spirit and thematic message of the note and welcome debate upon those (and indeed, one has already started).

Don

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## **6.6. Date: Thu, 10 Oct 91 15:14:51 -0400**

From: psynt@unix.cc.emory.edu (Mike Tomasello)  
Subject: primate social intelligence  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Primates do not use their social intelligence only for anti-social activities such as deceit and competition. They also use it for communication, cooperation (although probably not of the human kind), recruiting allies, making up after a conflict (see deWaal's latest book on Peacemaking in Primates), and all sorts of cooperative things as well. The focus on competition comes from the sociobiological (selfish gene) perspective; the interest is in those things that help you to achieve reproductive success.

## **6.7. Date: Tue, 15 Oct 1991 11:38:52 +0100**

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From: Alfred Lang <lang@psy.unibe.ch>  
Subject: Apes do teach and cooperate!  
To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet

Apes do teach and cooperate

In reply to Don Norman's recent instigating ramblings on symbolic thought I should like to share an experience and make a point.

Christoph and Hedwige Boesch (Former cooperators of Hans Kummer in Zurich, now at the University of Basel) report from a 12 year stay in the Tai Reserve in Ivory Coast. Jungle Chimps (in contrast to Savannah Chimps) have a much higher level

of tool use and they cooperatively chase. I do not know whether their articles are known already, a book is in preparation.

These chimps eat lots of hard nuts, having to crack them on suitable anvils with suitable hammers. At eating time, the forest soundsphere can be dominated by the hammering all around. Good hammers, esp. stones, are rare. They are shared or temporarily lent out. Young folks take several years to learn the skill, their mothers engage in teaching them, gradually going over from doing it for the kids to model to sort of coaching them to correcting their inefficient behaviors. The Boeschies deem the teaching essential for efficiency.

Also these chimps` chasing of small monkeys requires cooperation. Several males, occasionally females, encircle the prey to effectively cut their way. Participants seem to know their respective task and coordinate their ways.

Both examples seem to me to point out the essential role of external entities for the development in a species of the possibility of ontogenetic acquisitions and refinements of cognitive structures. Cooperative chasing is a spatial-social pattern requiring continuous updating of locations of prey and partners. Efficiency rises when the involved can make "predictions" as to the further course of events, i.e. behavior of prey and partners, on the basis of internal representation of the whole process. Even more so, with the artifacts of anvil and hammer, individuals can build up a personal history of observational, imitational, and gradually improving consumptive acts with their consequences, i.e. a cognitive and action control system, that forms the basis of their behavior, and in mothers, of their teaching. It seems to me that the replicative character of such situations - I mean with this the fact that anvils and hammers and to a certain extent also the chase topography form both a continuity and include variations - is essential for ontogenetic development. In this respect, interactions with artifacts including topographies, are different from the instinctual social behaviors, the latter being much more stereotyped, the single act being simply a token of a class to respond, the former being important exactly in their variant aspects to respond to in the service of efficiency.

My thesis, at any rate, would be that we should look for what we generally call psychological organisation in the compound of external entities, esp. artifacts, and internal structures together, rather than only inside the individual itself, as we traditionally do in psychology. I call such compounds ecological units. Am I right in assuming, Don, that your thinking goes in this direction?

Alfred

Dienstag, 15. Oktober 1991 10:17 Uhr

Alfred Lang

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[next AL message](#)

## 6.8. Date: Thu, 10 Oct 91 22:16:37 EDT

From: "William P Gardner" <wpg1@unix.cis.pitt.edu>  
Subject: Evolution & Cognition  
To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

Here are some references that might be of interest to Don Norman & others. I strongly recommend the writing of Leda Cosmides and John Tooby about evolutionary psychology and the generation of culture.

This quote epitomizes their central theme:

"The dynamics of natural selection in Pleistocene ecological conditions define adaptive problems that humans must be able to solve in order to participate in social exchange: individual recognition, memory for one's history of interaction, value communication, value modeling, and a shared grammar of contracts that specifies representational structure and inferential procedure. The nature of these adaptive information processing problems places constraints on the class of cognitive programs capable of solving them; this allows one to make empirical predictions about how the cognitive processes involved in attention, memory, learning, and reasoning are mobilized in situations of social exchange." (Cosmides & Tooby, 1989).

I read their work several years ago -- here is my 1 paragraph recollection. Human evolution during the Pleistocene offered opportunities for individuals to increase their fitness via cooperation. (I think they have division of labor leading to economic exchange in mind.) But cooperation offers the possibility of deceit and cheating, so selection will favor those who can detect cheaters. Hence one important adaptive problem that evolution must 'solve' is the development of a mind that can grasp a normative logic of social exchange and detect departures from it -- otherwise social relationships founder on prisoners' dilemmas. This means solving problems like: what did you promise, and would your action X fulfill it? Does our agreement permit you to do Y? Individuals who could solve these problems were able to participate successfully in cooperative social exchange and gained advantages relative to competitors. Cosmides interprets the Wason selection task in light of their theory.

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### 6.9. Date: 15 Oct 1991 14:48:09 EDT

From: "Mike Tomasello" <tomas@fs1.psy.emory.edu>  
Subject: Apes teach and cooperate: maybe  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

While it is true that the Boesches have made these observations of wild chimpanzees (reported by Laang), their interpretation is controversial. In my interpretation, the adults do not actively teach their young and correct their mistakes: in the published article the Boesches report two instances (over many years) of behaviors that might be called intentional teaching and both essentially involve the adult cracking nuts for herself, but just slowing down. Adults do routinely leave hammers where children can use them - which they would not do if they did not have children - but there is no correction or directing going on.

In cooperative hunting it is not clear that each animal is not just out for itself (There goes the monkey; I'll cut him off over here) and the appearance to us is one of cooperation (same goes for the hunting of wolves). There is no evidence that each animal has the behavior of the others in mind as s/he acts.

There are also different forms of social learning that animals engage in, and I do not believe (based on my two experimental studies - which are the only two experimental studies in existence) that chimpanzees engage in true imitative learning as human children do. They learn something about the tool and task, not about the mother's behavior or intentional states. (See my chapter entitled "Cultural transmission in the tool use and communicatory signalling of chimpanzees?" in S. Parker and K. Gibson "Language and intelligence in monkeys and apes", CUP, 1990).

Humans live in cultures while other animals do not at least partly because they learn from one another in unique ways. Overinterpreting chimpanzee behavior as intentional teaching and true imitation obscures important differences.

Mike Tomasello

**6.10. Date: Sat, 19 Oct 91 16:07 EDT**

From: Chris Robinson <Chris\_Robinson@carleton.ca>  
Subject: SHARING VS. DECEIT  
To: XLCHC@UCSD.EDU

JUST AN 'INSTIGATED RAMBLE' ON THE DECEITFUL-SHARING-INTELECTUALLY EVOLVING-WHILE-HUNTING-CHIMPANZEES DISCUSSION.....

It is not uncommon to see theories of early human evolution or interpretations of primate behaviour fall into two approaches: EITHER early humans/ non-human primates are seen as struggling individuals, competing with each other in a world of finite resources, OR they are seen as altruistic, sharing members of an harmonous group. Whether viewed as deceitful, hairy brutes or as loving miniature human beings, I suspect the dichotomous views are more IDEOLOGICAL than anything else. The Sharing-Deceit dichotomy is really the Sharing-Competition dichotomy.

WHOSE SIDE OUGHT ONE TAKE? I do not like taking sides on conceptual dichotomies, but, although the 'deceit-hypothesis' sounds interesting, I feel Richard Leaky's 'sharing-hypothesis' (1978) sounds a whole lot better. Leakey's hypothesis conforms to Reynold's (1982, in Engestrom 1987) view that "...a theory of the evolution of human technology should place less emphasis on differences in the tool-using capacities between human and apes (important as they are) but ask instead HOW EMERGENT TOOL-USING CAPACITIES BECOME INTEGRATED INTO THE DOMAIN OF INTENTIONAL SOCIAL ACTION." (added emph) (The'deceit-hypothesis', on the other hand, seems to view the evolution of human intelligence DIVORCED FROM TOOL USE!)

I should find some more recent writings by leakey, but I hope this quotation from 1978 will do. He wrote about how the invention of the carrier bag probably made sharing the leading activity for evolutionary change:

Chimpanzees strip leaves from twigs to form a probe for catching termites...they even occasionally use a stone to smash open hard nuts. None of these tools actually changes the animals' life-styles very much. But the invention of a primitive container -- the first carrier bag -- transformed the early hominids' subsistence ECOLOGY into a food-sharing ECONOMY. The digging stick may have come before or after the carrier bag, but, important though it was, it lacked the SOCIAL IMPACT of the container: the digging stick may have made life easier, but it didn't usher in an entirely new life-style. (p127; emphasis added)

He supported this idea by referring to the fact that chimps and gorillas are dadept weavers. At any rate, it may not n necessarily have been the carrier bag itself that transformed the life-activity of the primates, but SOMEKIND of tool with such 'social impact' probably did.

Now, given that something like the above logic is correct, I would like to pose a question: Does the introduction of SOCIALLY mediating tool that has impact on the social-life-activity constitute the emergence of SOCIETAL relations??? In other words, do social relations become SOCIETAL relations if they are MEDIATED?

Before societal relations can emerge, the direct, biological relations (such as parent-offspring, male-female) must 'break' and new, generalized ones form -- such that ANYBODY can take the place of offspring. [I get this idea from a paper by Niels Engelsted, 1990]. How could this 'rupture' happen, but with the introduction of a tool, mediating between social relationships? What breaks the DIRECT biological relations, and forms INDIRECT biological relations (or direct NON-biological relations)???

CHRIS :-)

Christopher Robinson

Carleton University

Ottawa, CANADA

## 6.11. Date: 91-10-22 09:00:01 MEZ

From: PO61170%DHHUNI4.BITNET@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU

Subject: Chimps and teaching/cooperation

To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Recent contributions to our discussion were very informative and interesting for me. I had no chance to read all the recent stuff from ethological psychology or cognitive biology. Please, colleagues, keep informing us about the state of your arts.

However, the most recent note from Mike Tomasello presupposed a certain methodological position that I cannot leave unchallenged, however new to the field I might be. It is this problem: If -- as Alfred Lang has reported from the research of the Boesches - there has been observed once or twice a certain behavior, we are already entitled to draw an empirical conclusion: It is *\*not impossible\** to see such behavior with this species. This affords us a kind of generalization that Klaus Holzkamp, German psychologist, called "Moeglichkeitsverallgemeinerung", i.e. generalization of the possibility.

This is an abductive conclusion (Peirce), to be sure. But it cannot be refuted by any one or two empirical and experimental studies. These only show actuality in the experimental context (be it white or natural), inform us about frequency.

It was often the case that after a first generalization of possibility, many observers saw suddenly what was thought impossible before the first scientifically recorded perception. E.G.: Galileo viewing the moons of Jupiter, Lise Meitner's first observation of an atomic fission.

The question that can be answered by studies like the ones that Mike Tomasello did, is of course also very important: Namely, to what extent (on which level) are chimps in this and this context usually showing their cooperative and educational potential ?

I found it always very non-productive to debate the level-naming issue: Should we call the "critical slowing down" of chimp mothers while their young were present "teaching", or should we not? This leads nowhere, except maybe to a more widespread regular use of words.

Arne Raeithel

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Psychology, U of Hamburg

## **6.12. Date: Wed, 23 Oct 91 15:03 EDT**

From: Chris Robinson <Chris\_Robinson@carleton.ca>  
Subject: IF LOOKS LIKE A DUCK...?  
To: XLCHC@UCSD.EDU

I AGREE (AND DISAGREE) WITH BOTH ARNE AND MIKE (TOMASELLO) HERE IS THE PART OF MIKE'S LETTER THAT I FEEL IS MOST IMPORTANT: "The issue in this case IS a definitional one because I am not questioning that something that looked like these key behaviors was OBSERVED....it is important that we distinguish different processes in some way." (MY EMPHASIS).

ANYHOW, HERE ARE MY THOUGHTS....

I think the logic behind the anticipated discovery of social co-operation in non-human primates could be put as follows:

- 1) There IS an evolutionary continuity to such processes as learning. Although there are qualitative discontinuities, rats, chimpanzees, and humans all learn.
- 2) There is a continuity of sociality. Examples of Subject-Subject (i.e., social) relations include parent- offspring, male-female, or even the 'communication' between living cells.
- 3) THEREFORE: if there is a continuity of 'learning' and a continuity of 'sociality', then why would there not be a continuity of 'social learning'?

Given the above, that what the chimps are doing with the hammers is 'social' and involves 'learning' is a GIVEN. The question really is: What FORM does this social learning take? Given these set of relations (ie, set of observations), does the activity TAKE ON THE FORM OF TEACHING? Thus, the 'observational' and the 'definitional' are inextricably related.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION? I think the old phrase "activity leads" would help us here. We may observe that a two year old child and a six year old both use spoons to eat -- perhaps even equalas well! OBJECTIVELY speaking, the two year-old is already engaging in the action of 'spoon using'. Acitivity leads. However, SUBJECTIVELY, i.e., FOR THE CHILD, s/he has not yet interiorized/appropriated the full societal meaning of the spoon. Thus, if one takes away the spoons the younger child will happily eat -- but the older child will infact complain that s/he CANNOT EAT WITHOUT A SPOON. (or if they do, they know to hide it from their parents!). The older child can reflect the meaning and has made spoon use THEIR OWN (i.e., appropriated it).

Objectively speaking, in these set of relations, are the chimpanzees engaged in TEACHING? If they indeed are, then how might we use this 'ecological information' to devise an 'ecologically valid' experiment? How do we find out if, subjectively, for the chimpanzees, they are reflecting the relation as a teaching relation??? [If I am not mistaken, Savage-Rumbaugh's laboratory environments were/are set up to support (?scaffold?) the 'symbolic co-operation' of chimpanzees.]

CHRIS :-)

Christopher Robinson  
Carleton University  
Ottawa, CANADA

### 6.13. Date: 24 Oct 1991 10:09:48 EDT

From: "Mike Tomasello" <tomas@fs1.psy.emory.edu>  
Subject: more chimps  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Chris Robinson captured my intention perfectly: there is continuity in chimpanzee and human social learning and interaction but this does not mean identity; there is a difference.

Arne Raeithel would like to know of what this difference consists and so I will offer up something here (hinted at in my original note) with regard to teaching. The key, as always, is in the intention: are the chimp Moms intending to teach their youngsters (which is different from the youngsters simply learning from Moms). Following Bruner, we can discover an intention by seeing if the animal in question: (1) persists toward something until a goal is reached, at which time it ceases activity, (2) if there is failure, multiple means are used until the goal is reached.

There does not seem to be any indication to me that chimp Moms have in mind the goal that their youngster learn something. They do not persist with child-directed behavior until the child performs a target behavior, nor do they try multiple means of teaching until the child reaches that target. There is no directing the child's behavior (e.g. placing its hands on the tool correctly) nor is their any overt correcting of



mistakes. I believe that the reason they do not do these things is precisely because they do not have (in Arne's words) a "theory of the infant's mind".

Boesch's observations were of a mother slowing down her behavior in a way that seemed like she wanted her youngster to observe and learn. It just seems to me that there are many other interpretations of why a mother might slow down her behavior on 2 occasions out of all of those observed. While we should always be alert to interesting anecdotes, I agree with Ethel Tobach that this is no substitute for systematic study.

Without going into detail I believe that a similar analysis holds for cooperation: we must analyze the animals' intentions to see if they intend to cooperate with others, whose mental states they are monitoring.

#### **6.14. Date: 91-10-24 11:45:05 MEZ**

From: PO61170%DHHUNI4.BITNET@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU  
Subject: Chimp's kind of cooperation or "teaching"  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Length: nearly four screens

The answers to my methodological note leave me somewhat puzzled. While Mike Tomasello acknowledges my concern, he nevertheless does not say what he thinks has been observed, i.e. at what level of supporting her baby's learning the chimp mother might have been operating. Maybe there is such a widespread understanding of what does not count as "teaching" that he thinks it unnecessary. Or, this information was contained in his first note -- I cannot check this because I lost many messages in a recent system breakdown of our computer center.

I am proceeding from the assumption that "something like teaching" is possible for chimps in natural circumstances, therefore we would have to define the minimal requirements for those earlier forms of cooperative behavior among parent/offspring groups. Chris Robinson hints at those when he points out that there must be a continuity of social learning, along of course with the enormous discontinuity that we see today when comparing full fledged symbolic communication with natural capabilities or even "artificial skills" possible with human trainers.

The second puzzle I have, is to find out where Chris might be disagreeing with me. As far as I can see we are exactly on the same track -- I have found Leakey's hypothesis very illuminating, too, and would also endorse the rule that "activity leads evolution". Indeed, the problem seems to be to clearly delineate the possible processes that might have become, by cultural reproduction, the generative core of the human level of cooperation. This, by the way, is lower than many harmonious theories would like to have it -- recent research in Germany on the reproductive

work of mothers has shown that only in a very minor part of their week they are actively trying to pursue the kind of negotiation work that theories of communication posit as laying the ground for shared intentions. Rather, most mothers simply "know without asking" what is good for their children, or appear to perform an anticipatory obedience to what their spouse might say, IF we would be asked, which he is not, however.

This bears on our chimp issue, too: Doubtless chimp mothers also "know" (have a feeling) for what is appropriate, and it seems very hard to decide whether this cognitive structure was pre-formed in the canalizing by their genes, is the result of social imitative learning, or points to some explicit "private theory of the infants mind" or whatever we might call the necessary prerequisite for the beginnings of "something like teaching" -- awareness of the need of the young to learn, maybe? A pre-concept of what learning is, even?

The third puzzle I have is with Ethel Tobach's answer. Disregarding the garbling of her text by the technicalities of e-mailing, I try to say what I made of her points:

1 & 2: Early generalizations of possibility nearly always depend on \*serendipitous research\* findings. Of course I recognize the need for more controlled and systematic studies. Do you say that we should not speculate about possible explanations until these are done, Ethel? 2 & 3: I agree completely, but do not see what your own position is regarding the potential of chimpanzees for inventing and continuing traditions of cooperative behavior patterns.

4: While speculating, I do not avoid any morphisms, zoo- or anthro-, there is a time for loose thought, and another for tightening. 6 & 8: Of course an encompassing explanation should tie together all those levels. I do not aim at such, not in notes to XLCHC at least. The phrase "continuity of work and labour" and your enquiry as to the "stand of activity theory" as regards the human/non-human dividing line seems to imply the classical (or orthodox) Marxist answer, namely that humans are distinguished by their capacity for material production with tools and machines.

I am not speaking for activity theory when I say that I dislike and mistrust this 19th century commonplace and 20th century dogma. I am now actively following the trail of looking for the singular semiotic capacities of humans. These might explain why we could invent material production, and not the other way round. There have always been scholars that saw things this way, and I regret deeply not having paid enough attention to their arguments before.

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P.S. I also lost the promised file with a digest of XLCHC discussion about Piaget and the non-representational approach. Sorry!!!

### **6.15. Date: Thu, 24 Oct 1991 09:28 EDT**

From: SERPELL <SERPELL@UMBC>

Subject: knowing how to parent without thinking

To: xlchc@ucsd

Arne Raeithel's message of Oct 24 ( Zambia's independence day ! and

United Nations Day !) includes the following item:

"the problem seems to be to clearly delineate the possible processes that might have become, by cultural reproduction, the generative core of the human level of cooperation. This, by the way, is lower than many harmonious theories would like to have it -- recent research in Germany on the reproductive work of mothers has shown that only in a very minor part of their week they are actively trying to pursue the kind of negotiation work that theories of communication posit as laying the ground for shared intentions. Rather, most mothers simply "know without asking" what is good for their children, or appear to perform an anticipatory obedience to what their spouse might say, IF we would be asked, which he is not, however.

This bears on our chimp issue, too: Doubtless chimp mothers also "know" (have a feeling) for what is appropriate, and it seems very hard to decide whether this cognitive structure was pre-formed in the canalizing by their genes, is the result of social imitative learning, or points to some explicit "private theory of the infants mind" or whatever we might call the necessary prerequisite for the beginnings of "something like teaching" -- awareness of the need of the young to learn, maybe? A pre-concept of what learning is, even? "

I would be grateful for some more details of this work with humans. On the face of it the interpretation floated here seems to undermine the need for positing something like "cultural models" or "ethnotheories" which play a significant part in the conceptualisation of parenting which my colleagues and I are working with.

Robert

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Robert Serpell

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### **6.16. Date: 91-10-24 21:38:56 MEZ**

From: PO61170%DHHUNI4.BITNET@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU  
Subject: A quick answer to Robert Serpell  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Robert: I did not want to say that human mothers do not think. Nor use ethnotheories, or whatever name the literature presently carries.

Marianne Resch's research was about explicit co-operative efforts to negotiate shared intentions in the family. This turned out to be a very rare affair.

Her dissertation is in German, I would have to look up the title and publisher.

Arne.

### **6.17. Date: Fri, 25 Oct 91 14:44 EDT**

From: Chris Robinson <Chris\_Robinson@carleton.ca>  
Subject: :-)  
To: XLCHC@UCSD.EDU

WE MAY AGREE MORE THAN IT FIRST APPEARED. THE FOLLOWING IS WHAT I THOUGHT WERE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ME AND THE OTHERS:

1) Arne Raeithel suggested that the issue of whether the chimps actually taught or not was 'observational' and not 'definitional'; Mike Tomesello argued that it WAS indeed 'definitional'. I, on the other hand, tried to show how the observational was definitional and vice versa. This may be a minor point, but I thought I'd mention it.

2) The second difference is more complicated. There are TWO levels of analysis here: the objective and the subjective. Whenever one deals with the activity of subjects, there are always these two poles.

Arne seemed, at first, to be saying that if, objectively speaking, we observe teaching behaviour in a certain set of relations, then that is good enough. If it looks like a duck, it's a duck. Thus, Arne seemed to be arguing from one level of analysis (the objective).

Mike's example of the hunting wolves demonstrated that we should look on a deeper level of analysis: The wolves may (objectively speaking) LOOK LIKE they are engaging in social co-operation, but (subjectively speaking) they are really 'out for themselves'. In other words, if something is not so on the subjective plane, then it is not so on the objective plane either. Thus, Mike seemed to be arguing primarily from the opposite level of analysis.

To this conflict of views, I proposed the phrase "activity leads" as a possible solution. In the example of the children using spoons, I said: Objectively speaking, the two year-old is ALREADY engaging in the proper activity. [Notice no definitional problem here]. But subjectively speaking, i.e. for the child, s/he is not yet reflecting the meaning of the spoon -- i.e., has not appropriated it. Thus, contrary to Mike's logic, I was saying that the chimps CAN engage in teaching, even if they are not reflecting it as such (e.g., reflecting as a goal).

That was my second difference with the earlier messages by Mike and Arne. But now that I have read the more recent ones, I really believe now that Mike, Arne and I actually AGREE.

The more recent note by Mike seems to be saying: "Objectively speaking, the chimps MAY OR MAY NOT be already engaging in teaching -- but I am almost certain that, subjectively speaking, the chimps are not reflecting it as such." This is very reasonable, and he supports it well. Arne's note seems to be saying: "I agree with the Boesch and Alfred Laang that the chimps are already engaging, under certain circumstances, in various forms of social co-operation, including teaching. This is so even if, subjectively speaking, the chimps turn out to be deficient." This is also reasonable. So there doesn't really seem to be any FUNDAMENTAL disagreement here at all :- ) (I hope)

3) Here is where Ethel Tobach's comments come in! How do we decide further? Just as removing the two spoons from the children revealed the differences between them (despite the external similarity), we now need to take the Boesch's information and do more controlled observation. I hinted at this when I said we must take the 'ecological information' and use it to dictate how we are to do 'ecologically valid' experiments.

WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE US? I think the question of whether the chimps are already engaging in a kind of teaching can be answered through Naturalistic (field) observation. But whether the chimps are actually reflecting it as such is best answered through ecologically valid experimentation. But I may be wrong on this; I must read Schneirla's "The relation between observation and experimentaion in the field study of behavior", 1972. Suffice it to say that I am no expert!

But let's go even further! The reason why the Boesch's observations are so fascinating is because they illuminate human evolution. Do mother chimpanzees teach young chimps who are not biological (or adopted) OFFSPRING? How did

teaching become SOCIETAL? How did societal relations evolve 'out of' social relations? And, yes, how did LABOUR evolve (for those of us who may still care ;- )?

CHRIS

Christopher Robinson  
Carleton University  
Ottawa, CANADA

### **6.18. Date: 25 Oct 1991 17:58:18 EDT**

From: "Mike Tomasello" <tomas@fs1.psy.emory.edu>  
Subject: my last note on this topic  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Chris Robinson's analysis of the agreement between Arne, me, and him is fine. It is just that I prefer to define such interactive concepts as teaching and cooperation subjectively - in terms of the intentions involved. I have a hard time understanding of what 'teaching objectively defined' might consist. Is it anytime one animal does something that helps another to learn - even if it is by accident? If that is so then much, practically all, of what chimpanzee mothers do is teaching their youngsters (and peers teach as well). In my analysis what the mother chimp is doing is opening the nut (because that is what she intends to do); she is not teaching (because she has no intentions that her youngster learn). Whether or not the youngster actually learns by observing the mother opening a nut is irrelevant for the question of whether or not we call the mother's behavior teaching.

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## 7. Culture and semiotics 1992: 4 / 31

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### 7.1. Date: 91-11-24 11:50:10 MEZ

From: PO61170%DHHUNI4.bitnet@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU  
Subject: Structural similarity between theories  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Length: 120 lines, ca five screens

Picking up my own thread, I want to point to some other theories, structurally similar to the activity theory (AT) of A.N. Leontyev and thus to the research traditions who are counting him as one of the founding fathers. The first one has been mentioned oftentimes on this network, and it was thought out in French Switzerland: Jean Piaget's theory of the self-development of human rationality out of the structure of our own actions. The connection and discussion between Vygotsky and Piaget is well known, there have been numerous references on this net.

Piaget was a biologist in his early and late teens, later became one of the leading and most productive structuralists. His "theoretical cloud" is much more diversified than AT in Leontyev's version. The research tradition founded by him seems to me much stronger, even though there are several factions, as usual...

I doubt that we would find definite structural disagreement in the basic tenets of both theories (activity of the living subject, objects as a source of knowledge but determining neither form nor content in any predictable way). There are, however, differences in the way the members of the traditions solve the perennial riddle of how we humans are different from animals, and how we are just another living species.

In the generation of Leontyev there was another theorist, JJ Gibson, who had structurally identical convictions about the dynamics of activity. In contrast to Piaget, he looked for the \*external\* sources of order in cognition -- of making knowledge possible. Like Leontyev, he insisted on the the material processes' independence from the animals, and tried to find out which external, stable patterns of the environment "afford" (offer, are there for grasping) information about the state of the world.

In all three theories, I am sorry to say, culture as an accumulation of physical and semiotic instruments and surroundings was given a passing mention, but not more. Like good psychologists should: Piaget, Leontyev and Gibson concentrated

on the centred view of the living human being, i.e. on the problem how you and I could ever find our own way in the chaos of everyday life.

In my perception -- as always I have not read enough -- other sciences or humanities or human sciences have done more to throw light on the cultural context of our very different human predicaments. Psychology is not enough, this much is easy to state. I will not try to sum up the necessary import of knowledge and concepts and methods. -- I do not have this overview, anyway.

Mike Cole should be the one to comment here; since several years he has been labouring to inform psychologists about culture. Or Jim Wertsch, with his psycho- and sociolinguistic approach. Or you generally, readers of XLCHC...

Recently, via side exchanges with Alfred Lang (Bern, Switzerland) I have been reminded of another figure in the history of psychology who also built a structurally similar 'full circle model' of human activity: Kurt Lewin in his theory of the life-space and its dynamics stemming from the quasi-forces inherent in mental representations of the "inviting quality of things" (der Aufforderungscharakter der Dinge), something very akin to Gibsonian affordances but fully dependent on the subjects and their culture).

In one important article, called "On the Knowledge in Things and Places" (1991), Alfred Lang has reframed the Lewinian life-space model along semiotic lines (at least this is how I understand his endeavour). This means to locate the meanings not merely in the personal, mental representations of the actors, but also -- with equal or greater importance -- in the meaningful physical surroundings like homes or dwellings. I quote from the closing paragraph of the theoretical exposition of the paper (which is followed by a report on empirical case studies):

\*External memory\* or \*the 'concrete mind'\* is then a formula I have chosen as a catch phrase to point to the functional equivalence of the (internal) mind and the cultural environment. There is a large thesaurus of knowledge stored in the spaces and objects formed and cultivated by people. If we want to understand it, we have to study people in conjunction with these external structures. Men-environment systems or \*ecological units\* are in my opinion the proper subject of investigation for psychology in an ecological perspective.-- Lang 1991, p 78 in: M. von Cranach, W. Doise & G Mugny (Eds): *Social Representations and the Social Basis of Knowledge*. (=Proceedings of the 1st Congress of the Swiss Society of Psychology, Bern Sep 1989). Bern: Huber 1991.

Long-time readers of XLCHC will be reminded of the very similar perspective of Don Norman: He has repeatedly shown how to look at cultural details of how we humans are finding our way in homes and offices. Yet, it is somewhat ironic that I learned of Alfred Lang's work from XLCHC, an electronic detour many times longer than the direct line from Hamburg to Bern. I now see that I overlooked much of the



work done in Europe because of rigidity in attentional focus (staring at the Americas like the rabbit at the snake?).

Another example: I did not read enough of Boesch and co-workers in Saarbruecken, Germany, I am sorry to say, until a special issue of the LCHC Quarterly Newsletter appeared. Saarbruecken is a town in the federal state of Saarland, near the French border. French social psychology, especially Moscovici's theory of social representations is on my reading list, too, but I am nearly despairing over the length of it.

But then Ed Hutchins of UCSD-CogSci has a consoling message for all of us (drawn from his studies of distributed cognition in professional teams): It suffices if we are \*locally aware\* of the best ideas in regional circulation. We can then proceed to distribute them via channels like XLCHC, be surprised by the similarities, and discuss the remaining differences.

Arne.

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## 7.2. Date: Sun, 24 Nov 91 10:32:10 pst

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
Subject: contrasting approaches  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

I have downloaded and printed Arne's recent messages in order to study them properly before responding. I'll add one item that I was poised to send out before the last pair of notes from Arne, however, since it is relevant to the issue of culture in various psychological approaches.

Alfred Lang, whose interesting work Arne notes, has another paper entitled "Non-Cartesian culture: steps toward a semiotic ecology" which has lots of interesting ideas in it. But Alfred expresses a view that surprises me in the following comments, which is apropos of contrasting approaches:

"A related approach to artifacts and psycho-social processes, yet Cartesian and restricted to linguistic signs in a Saussurain conception, is the cultural-historical

theory instigated by Vygotsky (see e.g. Wertsch, 1985). Phylo- and ontogenetic relatedness of mental and artifactual phenomena and the mediating role of imagery and spoken and written words are clearly seen (see e.g. Cole, in press--the paper given at Lahti- MC) for an example on the processes between children and computer systems) although conceptual tools appear to lack the elegance and power triadic semiotics allows for." (p. 10)

Three parts of Alfred's remarks (in general I like the paper a lot!) puzzle me.

1. I thought a cultural-historical approach was ANTI-Cartesian.
2. I did not think the notion of mediation is restricted to linguistic signs
3. I was not aware that triadic semiotics is more powerful and elegant.

All three puzzles may be the result of my ignorance, but I am pretty sure the first two are different readings than I have encountered previously and I need to know a lot more about the application of semiotics to problems of learning and development before I can get my mind around #3.

Arne- You have read more of Alfred's work than I have. Can you help, or perhaps Alfred will be back on line to contribute.

mike

### 7.3. Date: Thu, 9 Jan 1992 13:39:25 +0100

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From: Alfred Lang <lang@psy.unibe.ch>  
Subject: Non-Cartesian Vyg? (290 lines!)  
To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet, Cc: slongo@psy.unibe.ch

**\*\*Cartesian or Anti-Cartesian Vygotsky?\***

In a note entitled "Contrasting Approaches" incited by Arne Raeithel November last year -- sorry for responding late because of rather grave illness; I am recovering, going reasonably well, but not yet full power -- Mike Cole quoted from a (gray) paper of mine entitled "Non-Cartesian culture: steps towards a semiotic ecology". Reports from the Group for Environmental and Cultural Psychology, Institute for Psychology, University of Bern. 26 Pp.

"((23)) ..... A related approach to artifacts and psycho-social processes, yet Cartesian and restricted to linguistic signs in a Saussurian conception, is the cultural-historical theory instigated by Vygotsky (see e.g. Wertsch 1985). Phylo- and ontogenetic relatedness of mental and artifactual phenomena and the mediating role of imagery and spoken and written words are clearly seen (see e.g. Cole, in press --the paper given at Lahti- MC --, for an example on the processes between

children and computer-systems), although conceptual tools appear to lack the elegance and power triadic semiotics allows for. ...." (p.10)

Mike went on: "Three parts of Alfred's remarks (in general I like the paper a lot!) puzzle me.

1. I thought a cultural-historical approach was ANTI-Cartesian.
2. I did not think the notion of mediation is restricted to linguistic signs
3. I was not aware that triadic semiotics is more powerful and elegant.

All three puzzles may be the result of my ignorance, but I am pretty sure the first two are different readings than I have encountered previously and I need to know a lot more about the application of semiotics to problems of learning and development before I can get my mind around #3."

These are essential questions and possibly helpful in furthering understanding. My paper was not a place refer to other (contrasting) approaches, but I thought the cultural-historical theory to be so important that I wanted at least to mention it. In a book I am working at, I shall discuss other approaches to what I prefer to call the ecological problem, culture included. So I should like to answer in some detail, hopefully instigating replies to correct or improve my understanding.

From the beginning, I should make clear that I am not a Vygotsky expert at all. I do not read Russian, I know a limited number of his texts, few secondary materials beyond the monographs of Wertsch and Kozulin, and little of the broad developments they instigated. I have developed my semiotic ecology approach in relative isolation, which obviously is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Reading cultural-historical material since less than a year, I have come to admire many thoughts of Vygotsky and his followers in spite of many dark passages in his writings. So please take my remarks as a probe for my understanding. (Naturally I oscillate between being happy and angry with myself for having overlooked the cultural-historical theory in my first reading of "Thinking and Speech" 15 years or so ago and for having reinvented in the last few years so much of what I could have read in his and other's papers.) I go backwards with Mike's 3 puzzles:

#3 Of course, this is a belief of mine at this stage of my understanding. It was just surprising to me how things simplify, when I go behind the prevailing Morrisian scheme or model of semiotics to what I can read in early Peirce and what I call an \*elementary triadic semiotics\*. Peirce clearly had Wittgenstein's seminal insight (that the meaning of a word is its use) in the much broader sense that the meaning of a sign is what it can produce. So I suggest a semiotics that does not look for meaning in consciousness but rather in structures, internal (mind, very broadly) or external to the individual (culture), or including both, that can influence other structures. A sketch of this elementary semiotics is in the paper, yet I am well

aware it needs elaboration and and lots of discussion among psychologists and semioticians. But I am glad you give it a try.

#2 Your phrasing of my statement is certainly not what I wanted to say. My fault! My sentence, intended to be short, is awfully distorting my picture of Vygotskian semiotics. I wanted to say that the cultural-historical understanding of the human-environment-relation, insofar as signs are involved, seems to be based on a restrictedly linguistic conception of signs, "linguistic" taken in a wide sense of course, including number systems, diagrams etc. I should have mentioned tools also, of course. But then as to signs proper, I have read only of signs that are more or less well defined and in essence arbitrary code systems. This is rather typical of Saussurian semiology, namely of a semiotic unit as a correspondence between sign and signified (although Saussure himself knew well of the triadic nature of "parole" while founding a rather dyadic notion of "langue"). In addition signs are conceived to work from outside in, from the social to the mental, i.e. from the sign to the meaning. Saussure type semiology also tends to a priori definitions of what is a sign or a class of signs, the sign having a material form, the signified being mental (see #1 below). Perhaps I am over-accentuating my case; I am aware that some of the triadic aspects are taken up in the sense - meaning distinction by Vygotsky and his followers; but the a priori definition of signs is obvious.

This for me somewhat narrow "Saussurian" conception of semiotics I read in Vygotsky is probably related to the layer problem we have discussed last summer. Tools and signs, i.e. mediation, is restricted to the "higher mental processes" in his view. Maybe there exist what is called "higher" psychological processes. But why should we prejudice the matter and then get problems of definition and probably have insolvable questions as to how to define the separation line between higher and lower? In many passages Vygotsky seems to conceive of the higher functions as only a reorganization of the ensemble of the more primitive functions, in other places the functions themselves appear to change or new ones to be added in development. But then: do we really know the lower functions? We cannot but conceive them in terms of higher functions, and, by the way broadly linguistically. I would prefer to start with the general and then have, if necessary, empirics to force me to introduce something specific, rather than start with the specific and thus perhaps prejudice the field.

At any rate, in my view, there is no reason (except religious belief) to assume anything completely new in phylogenesis at the switch to humans, say something similar in scope as the change from simple matter to life (cells with membranes) or the addition of organelles within the cell (the prokaryotes to eukaryotes transition). Also from a philosophy of science point of view I would like to proceed in an open way such as to use scientific tools general enough to allow for such a difference to make itself manifest, if it is important, rather than to put it into the subject from the beginning. Let us describe and generalize and then see what the layering is to be found and what it is about.

So I like to think of \*mediation\* as a more general concept than Vygotsky uses it. Many more process than those with fixed tools and coded signs in social systems have to be mediated. For example, the information in the genom is mediated by enzymes and proteins etc. in a suitable environment to control the buildup of an organism; the availability of proper food does not mechanically trigger consumption but needs to be mediated from a sensitive to a consumptive subsystem respecting the present state of the organism; an animal social system can only function if mediated by instincts comprising reciprocal perceptive and actional mediators, morphological and behavioral, transient and lasting, e.g. the fact that an individual is female and ready for procreation needs to be mediated to a male by characters such as bodily and behavioral traits and states and acts or the developmental buildup of a mother-infant relation in animals and humans needs to be mediated by so many suitable and reciprocal natural or artifactual settings and behavioral sequences; linguistic communication between adult humans is mediated on many levels from perceptive and executive phonemics to the sign structures that Vyg focusses upon, etc. etc. It seems to me less important to define mediating forms such as tool or sign systems but rather to grasp the mediation process and then see by what means the mediation is achieved. Whether mother child contact is achieved by an anatomical structure (in marsupials), by a built external structure (a nest in birds or a cloth or other cultural device in humans), by visual (such as in geese or in deer) or by accoustic instincts (such as in some singing birds or in humans by babytalk) is secondary to the fact that quite similar effects are achieved by so different means. All these means, in a Peircean conception are conceived as signs. Only in an open view we have a chance to observe perhaps the nascence and becoming of a formal sign system. Only in an open conception we can deal with the several and mostly simultaneous aspects of signs, which Peirce characterised as iconic, indexical and symbolic. Very few signs, it seems, are totally arbitrary. For Vygotsky icons and indices appear not to be signs (see e.g. 1978, *Mind in Society*, p.98).

In addition, what puzzles me in Vygotsky is that I have found no passage where he deals with the genesis of the social system. If sign mediation goes from the social to the individual, how does the social, i.e. language etc., arise in the first place? Can you help me? What did I miss to read? I know, there is a scientific as well as an ideological aspect to that question. Here I would restrict myself to ask for a scientific understanding of how in the cultural-historical theory the social system is achieved.

So I do not find it meaningful to restrict the conception of signs to something internally oriented and of tools to something externally directed. In order for the social system to have signs available to a child, somebody must have created a sign system before. And also in order for somebody to use a tool, its function must be internalized by the user. Tools and signs, in order to being capable of mediating, must themselves be mediated. Of course, this broader idea of mediation needs more detailed discussion.

In the texts of Vygotsky, I have read so far, I have missed most a clear conception of the two respective instances or agencies between them mediation takes place. Vyg appears to me to avoid specifying the relata of mediation. Did anybody investigate that problem?

#1 This leads me to the most intriguing question of Vygotskys alleged Cartesianism. Of course, the point depends on of what you want to understand by Cartesianism. Since Vyg is a declared Marxist and materialist, he is, by definition, anti-Cartesian. I agree.

However, if I read, his papers, for example the 1925 paper on consciousness (I have a German version) but also the later ones, I am puzzled so much. Why did he in the first place, keep the consciousness terminology? (In one place he, like Peirce, boldly states that you have to invent a new term if you propose a new concept!). He declares being a monist but constantly sounds dualistic; the layer matter again. But lets go deeper than wording.

For me, Cartesianism (not the philosophy of Descartes but rather a somewhat axiomatic system of thought that characterizes Western scientific culture, Peirce called it the "spirit of Cartesianism") is the systemactic combination of:

- a) dualism (res extensa - res cogitans)
- b) subject - object opposition
- c) linear methodology (clear and distinct thoughts in rational connection)
- d) placing certainty in the (rationally, see c) cognizing subject
- e) claiming the subject to be able to dispose of the object

Of course, (a) and (b) are older in origin, but Descartes paralleled the two and brought the dichotomy from heavens down to earth; (c) is Descartes most seminal contribution, (d) is his most famous and infamous one; (e) is also older, biblical in fact, but as a part, a sort of corollary, of the combination (a-d) it has long been bee hailed as plain progress, but is visible in its full technical impact and human consequences only rather recently. Lets concentrate on (c) and (d). Peirce has heavily and constructively shot against those from 1868 on: Against the "single thread of inference" (a) he proposed triadic representation logic, but it is only a few decades now that linear control and linear system equations are acknowledged in some parts of science as a very special case. "That the ultimate test of certainty is to be found in the individual consciousness" (d, in Peirce's words) has lead to two alternative and equally problematic ways: either you deny and then forget about the subject being part of knowledge acquisition (such as in empiricism) or you have to spell out what the subject really is (such as in Kant's transcendental subject and Hegel's Weltgeist).

I believe that Vygotsky is not non-Cartesian and therefore in a way Cartesian, because he deals arbitrarily with the Cartesian system of axioms.

(a) Yes he throws out *res cogitans*, but he also places great emphasis on higher mental processes being distinct from lower ones; so he declares himself materialist but investigates consciousness in terms of linguistically mediated meaning and sense, which he deems different from other (natural) meaning and sense.

(b) I do not think that he really threw out the subject. He seems to make little use of the term, yet time and again we have phrasings such as: the psychological tools serve the child to control his/her psychological processes. This presupposes some kind of subject in the individual. Although he seems to believe that the individual subject is only formed in the course of development, since consciousness itself is the result of internalized signs coming from the social system, he is not clear about that. What is the individual before s/he acquires consciousness?

But more important he has a tendency of replacing the individual subject by some social subject, this being the primary source and also agency for bringing about the individual subjects. In a way then, the "ultimate test of certainty" in Marxist and cultural-historical psychology is no longer in the individual but rather in a virtual social subject. Unfortunately we read practically nothing about the constitution of the social system beyond Marxist fundamental thesis.

I would call this a variant of Cartesianism. Instead of "*cogito ergo sum*", Vygotsky, in my understanding, seems to say: we, as a society, act with tools and signs, therefore we exist and are the basis of certainty of knowing. Sure the catalogue of characters of Kant's transcendental subject is thrown out; but what characters has society forming the individual consciousness? And how do these characters arise? I was unable to find anything on these questions in the texts available to me so far. So (d) is perhaps modified, but it is Cartesian in nature. And (e) is certainly retained, as has been evident in the now closed history of at least one society.

I am not at all sure how he deals with (c): as a materialist he must fully embrace it, at least in his time; as a historian he might do differently, but as Marxist historian ?? -- I need help also with this question.

Sorry, my short remark in the paper needed so long an explanation. I hope the reader feels that my intent was not to defend my statements but rather to further developments in the so exciting cultural-historical approach. Time will show whether the more general type of semiotics that I defend will prove useful.

Alfred Lang

Donnerstag, 9. Januar 1992 13:38 Uhr

Alfred Lang, Professor of Psychology

Psychol.Inst., Univ. Bern, Switzerland  
Laupenstrasse 4, CH-3008 BERN  
e-mail: lang@psy.unibe.ch

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#### **7.4. Date: Thu, 9 Jan 92 21:05:23 pst**

From: Gary Shank Via: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
Subject: forward from Shank  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

gary sent this to me by mistake and asked that I pass it along.

mike

--

Well, I have just briefly scanned Alfred Lang's comments and Mike's comments to them and to Michael Carrithers. I am very glad to hear Lang is back from his illness; I checked onto the list after he made his hiatus, and I am very impressed with his ideas. Let me just throw in a few cents about a path that a psychologist can take through Peirce and semiotics, having traveled that bumpy but fascinating road myself for the last 15 years...

There is a naturalistic tradition in american semiotics that might make an ideal place of entry for psychologists. The obvious starting point is the work on zoosemiotics by Tom Sebeok. Just about any of his essay books will take you there; i prefer *\*the sign and its masters\** *\*the play of musement\** and *\*i think i am a verb\** any decent library will have these books. there is also an important article on naturalistic semiotics in *Semiotica* around, i think, 1977 or so, by Thure von Uehxhull, son of radical biologist Jakob von Uexhull. Here, Thure lays out Jakob's theory of the umwelt. it occurs to me that tom sebeok might be controversial because of his stance on the clever hans effect and ape sign language, but his position is often misunderstood here. sebeok is not claiming anything special about human language other than it is, he thinks, a species specific behavior, much like hand-washing on the part of raccoons; therefore, teaching language to apes is like teaching handwashing to badgers--there's no species link. anyway, the ape stuff is the least interesting of tom's zoosemiotic work, in my humble opinion.

on cartesianism and language, let me make two points. first, there is a feeling in some semiotic circles that glottocentric semiotics, a la saussure, is a minor variant of a larger tradition/position. john deely lays out the best argument for this in the introduction of his edited book, *frontiers in semiotics*, from iu press. as far as cartesianism is concerned, peirce was not so much anti-cartesian as a cartesian. he took a path that led us back before descartes' ideas took hold; that is, he was a neo-medievalist. by the way, so are many semioticians, including eco, deely and



myself. the modern contempt for medievalist thinking is so pervasive that we fail to realize that medieval ideas constitute the very basis of any western historical-cultural stance. you might want to read chapter 2 of augustines \*on christian doctrine\* for a spectacular introduction to the theory of signs. also recall the wonderful work on memory in the confessions. augustine was a first rate psychologist! finally, what about some entry level stuff to semiotics per se. i recommend john fiske's introduction to communication studies, lakoff and johnson's metaphors we live by, david savan's outstanding monograph on peirce for the toronto semiotic circle. as for peirce himself, the sledding is formidable indeed... talk to you later. thanks for listening.

gary shank

### **7.5. Date: Thu, 9 Jan 92 16:50:34 pst**

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
Subject: semiotics/culture/Descartes  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

#### Semiotics and Cultural-Historical Psychology

Thanks for the long answer to my queries about your paper, "Non-Cartesian culture" Alfred.

I am not sure how to proceed. Its the usual problem of not knowing how many folks want to pursue this topic. My strategy is to attempt to build a discussion piecemeal. In this message I am only trying to abstract and list what I think the major issues are. I will list them and then make a meta comment. I suggest that we continue at the XLCHC level until the collective reader/writership makes it clear that the discussion is of only parochial interest and should be continued in a sub-x-discussion.

I have marked the following points for discussion:

- 1) Is LSV's conception of signs was restrictively linguistic?
- 2) Is the "natural-cultural" dichotomy useful?
- 3) Are humans something completely new in phylogeny?
- 4) Is LSV's notion of mediation unduly restrictive?
- 5) Where does the social come from?
- 6) Is there, anywhere in Vygotsky, a clear conception of the two agencies which are being mediated?

## 7) The definition of Cartesianism (criteria a-d)

Is this a reasonable/correct list? If not, what would you like to add/change/subtract? I certainly do not feel myself competent to engage all of them, but if the topics are interesting enough, perhaps others can fill the void (often it seems limitless!) of my ignorance.

I'll wait to hear from you and others before commenting specifically, but one reaction/circumstance is probably worth putting out front. My use of cultural-historical ideas is very certainly not found acceptable by many Russian decendents of the school, some of whom (Rubtsov, Velichkovsky, Subbotski) recieve xlhc/xact mail. My graduate training is as an American mathematical psychologist, my introduction to the school's ideas was through Luria, and my interpretations subject to criticism of misappropriation (cf the fine work of Valsiner and Van der Veer on American appropriations of Russian psychology).

I am a total neophyte in dealing with Pierce, although persuaded by Arne that it is necessary to gain expertise. My (perhaps odd) interpretation of the notion of mediation is that it IS (almost) phylogenetically unique--to the extent that culture is phylogenetically unique to humans. My interpretation of mediation yields "artifact" as the primitive category which motivates a distinction between cultural and natural. My ideas about Cartesianism and the cultural-historical school are much influenced by the writing of David Bakhurst which in turn owes a great deal to the writings of the Russian philospher, Evald Ilyenkov.

How, given our different starting points, we can jointly create a meeting of the minds (echoes of Michael Carrithers!) is not clear to me, but there is a crude characterization of my starting orientation.

I am glad to hear that you have overcome your illness, Alfred, and look forward to hearing from you concerning next steps.

mike

## 7.6. Date: Fri, 10 Jan 1992 12:28:33 +0100

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From: Alfred Lang <lang@psy.unibe.ch>  
Subject: Culture and Semiotics  
To: xlhc@ucsd.BitNet Cc: slongo@psy.unibe.ch

Mike, I welcome your excellent list. Piecemeal proceeding is certainly indicated although we should never forget the intimate relations between the pieces. Let me comment on the list:

All 7 questions are to the point. I think that #1 and #7 should be considered sort of pointer questions. Definite answers are either unavaiblabe or uninteresting, yet asking this way may help a lot. Naturally I have taken position as to #2 (only insofar as it helps understanding the transition), #3 (no), #4 (I believe it a special case). I would like to learn from the experts on #5 and #6 and have my views on the other questions torn into pieces. Perhaps, I feel, the mediation question (#4 and #6) is the one that might lead us best into substantive matters.

I might like to add a #8:

What is the relation between linguistic and other signs (e.g. spatial, objectal)?

and a related

#9: Are signs necessarily in definable (and on an element level fixed) sign systems (codes) or is "spontaneous" sign production and use possiblebeyond new combination of elements?

As to the spirit of the discussion, I would like everyone taking part to be always aware that something like the cultural-historical approach is like a river in a large delta and which hopefully is incorporating streamlets and streams from other sources and river systems. Making (critical) statements is then like heaping up hills and mountains: they can never stop an existing stream, but perhaps might lead it in other directions and confluences.

Now to the first point, Mike, you make to mediation and culture and the phylogetical uniqueness of artifacts. I would like to advance the contrasting thesis that animals of many species produce lots of artifacts, peculiarly formed spatial structures that are tangible and have effects on themselves and on conspecifics and other living systems,; but it seems uncommon, perhaps unheard of, perhaps impossible(?), that they combine artifacts in flexible manner as humans do. How do we convene to use the term artifact?

Gary, please repeat your note forwarded by Mike directly to xlhc, if you can, it arrived here awfully distorted. To your excellent introductory semiotics reading suggestions and background I would like to add the recommendation to start by reading \*early\* Peirce. Several of his most seminal (for his later development) papers are in vol. 2 (1867-1871) of the new "Writings of C.S. Peirce, a chronological edition", Bloomington, Indiana Univ. Press,1984.

And: my linguistic and stylistic competence in English being frail: would there be a difference between "a-Cartesian" and "non-Cartesian"?

Alfred

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**7.7. Date: 10 Jan 1992 10:14:14 EDT**

From: "Mike Tomasello" <tomas@fs1.psy.emory.edu>  
Subject: Re: forward from Shank  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

One persons's opinion on zoosemiotics.

One of the main problems from the point of view of those interested in human/cultural things is that very few animal researchers distinguish "natural" signs that just happen to be attached to or associated with other living beings from intentionally produced communicative signals. Thus, for most ethologists the scent of another animal is a communicative sign, the color of another animals feathers is a communicative sign, and so on and so forth - and all of these in the same way as a chimpanzee intentionally signalling to another in order to initiate a grooming bout. Unintentional things that may be interpreted by others as signs are no doubt important from the point of view of the evolution of social behavior (color of feathers is important in mating, e.g.), but if we are looking for \*mediation\* we need a special category for intentionally produced communicative signals - i.e.those produced with the intention that another understand and respond in a certain way (and there are operational defintions for such intentionality). This is one of the origins of true mediation, in my opinion, and thus is at the core of Mike's take on the natural-cultural distinction.

Mike Tomasello

**7.8. Date: Fri, 10 Jan 92 09:02 CST**

From: P30GDS1@NIU.BITNET  
Subject: a note on animal mediation and zoosemiotics  
To: XLCHC@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

Thanks for your inisghtful comments on zoosemiotics, mike tomasello. your point about intentional mediation is well taken, and i think that most semioticians would agree with you that there is a major difference between signs that an organism has that others read and signs that organisms make for others to read. but

But we mustn't lose sight of the fact that the act of reading signs, whether the signs are intentional or not, is a powerfully mediational phenomenon. Let me give you my favorite example. There is a certain type of moth that has a very primitive auditory system. In fact, it can only hear one sound--the sonar beep of a bat. This is crucial, since the moths are considered to be taste treats for the bats. The bat is putng out the sound for one reason -- to find prey. the moth only 'hears' one 'word' in its umwelt (or world of experience, as opposed to just simply an en- vironment) -- 'danger.' In other words, if the moth hears anything, the moth is in danger...

Certainly the bat is not intending to communicate its presence to the moth. Furthermore, the moth can't hear anything except for the bat. And yet, upon 'reading' the 'sign' from the bat, the moth carries on a wide variety of avoidance acts. The moth's world has been powerfully mediated by this one sensory ability, thereby creating an *umwelt* where the moth *\*acts\** not simply responds in mechanical fashion to the sound.

The point i want to make is that mediation requires at least, but needs only one, agent. When we have deliberate communication, we have two agents; one who intends to communicate, and one who realizes that the first one is trying to communicate and who then tries to understand and respond to that communication. But the bat is 'communicating' with the moth in a sense; the moth certainly responds to the bat's signal as if it were a message of threat. One last point in this ramble; von Uexhull says that all organisms have *umwelts*, or worlds of experience that define the immediate environment as a locale of meaning. Yet, he goes on to say that humans have a *lebenswelt*, or a life world, and an *innenwelt*, or an inner world. These are human expansions on the basic idea of *umwelt*, and allow for culture and language etc. I think these concepts help address some of your issues. Thanks again for listening.

Gary Shank, NIU

### **7.9. Date: 10 Jan 1992 14:42:00 EDT**

From: "Mike Tomasello" <tomas@fs1.psy.emory.edu>  
Subject: Re: a note on animal mediation and zoosemiotics  
To: XLCHC@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

Reading the signs available in the behavior or physiology of other animals is indeed an important skill for many, if not most, animals (certainly all those that reproduce sexually). All I am arguing is that this process is not different in fundamental nature from the reading of the signs of the inanimate world - that a certain location is likely to be a good food source, for example. Reading signs is simply what we mean by cognition, in some sense.

Things change, I would argue, when we get to animals actively using signs to influence their worlds, and moreover, the nature of this change is such that it starts us on the road to mediation in the sense it is meant by Vygotsky, Cole, etc. Simply reading a sign, social or non-social, does not, in my interpretation, require mediation in this narrower, intentional sense; reading signs is just the fundamental cognitive process of going "beyond the information given". After you can actively use signs, interpreting intentional signs produced by others is mediational as well, perhaps - because their nature has changed (cf. Mead, 1934).

**7.10. Date: Fri, 10 Jan 92 15:10 CST**

From: P30GDS1@NIU.BITNET (Gary Shank)  
Subject: animal mediation revisited  
To: XLCHC@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

the points you make about actively using signs to influence our worlds are well taken, and that is certainly a far different act than reading the signs of inanimate objects. but it is also true that reading the signs of an animate living object is much different than reading the signs of an inanimate object, since the living object is either actually or capable of reading you as you read it, and of responding to your act of reading per se. This is far more than just going beyond the information given, and might just be the primitive basis for the complex form of mediation that humans do in fact to face communication.

gary shank, niu

**7.11. Date: Mon, 13 Jan 1992 11:42:32 +0100**

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From: Alfred Lang <lang@psy.unibe.ch>  
Subject: Nature/Culture and Mediation (100 lines)  
To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet, Cc: slongo@psy.unibe.ch

There we are, in the midst of a hot debate, thanks to Mike Tomasello and Gary Shank. Both take, although differing somewhat, converging middle positions on distinguishing between nature and culture and therefore assume 2 types of mediation, which seems reasonable. However, for me, a number of problems remain open.

Let me make clear from the beginning: of course, there is a difference between nature and culture. The question perhaps is less one of pointing to distinctive criteria than of giving a scientifically sound conception that relates and differentiates the two phenomena. In this, the difference in sign use MT and GS point to are not satisfactory to me.

How can "a special category for intentionally produced communicative signals" (MT) or a "major difference between signs that an organism has \*that\* others read and signs that organisms make for others to read" (GS) carry the difference? The discussants do not explain, they just declare.

I have emphasized the "that" in Gary's sentence because I would really love the statement without this "that". Because, why should an individual have, carry or make, characters if not for others to possibly read them? What would be the fundamental difference between carrying a character in the form of a colored feathers or another in the form of an instinct to develop and display a red dummy in spring?

Also the meaning of the words "intentional" or "active sign use" (MT and GS) remain fully open to me. What are the operational definitions for intentionality you mention, Mike? I guess that you mean intentionality in the sense of purposiveness rather than plain relatedness. Can intentions be other than attributions by either an addressee or an observer or the sign sender herself? Usually it is proposed to ask the sender about her intentions. Why should the sender be in a better position to tell than the other two? If you ask her beforehand, you disturb the process; if you ask after the fact, he might tell you anything. With these kinds of definitions a human infant could never communicate because you cannot ask him, and the same would be true of course of animals. Are there basically better operational definitions?

I do not deny that something like intentions and culture is the case, phenomenologically. Only I do not like to declare their existence by definition. My 18 years old cat probably has plans and intentions too, obviously, when she sits for long near a particular door and, when this is opened, then, in passing, glances high onto her preferred cupboard and systematically jumps in several steps up there and goes to sleep. But how can I infer or attribute her a plan when she does some other act that she must have acquired in the course of her life, but that does not include waiting and glancing? I simply can never know empirically in any particular case, although I can find cases where it is reasonable to assume some plan, so I am led to induce in general that she is capable of acquired goal oriented or planned behavior.

But then, vice versa with humans. Am I not in exactly the same principal difficulty that I find deliberate, intended (GS) communication on so many occasions but can never be sure of whether it really was (consciously) intended in the particular instance? Let's assume that I intend to impress a guy with well educated speech. Did I not, years ago acquire a habit of carrying glasses because of bad sight rather than because of my present intention to impress someone, although some research demonstrated that it might contribute to my expressive imposing behavior now? Does it make a difference per se on the other, if I know or do not know of that research (of course knowing can change my accompanying behavior). And if I happen to be rather small or tall which can be easily perceived, do I always intend to communicate with such characters I carry, have or produce? Do I really intend to communicate with all the aspects of my actual linguistic and paralinguistic acts? I believe this to be wishful tinkering.

Or to go to my favorite field. Selecting and placing things in a home has many more communicative effects on partners or children living in than we can ever think of at or before the time we place it. If architects really had specific intentions on what they want to communicate to residents and on the effects they want to have on them, when they plan houses, they would probably design quite differently (if they would do it at all if they knew what they really do to people!). My point here is **that a large part of our communicative behavior is not present in our consciousness, exactly because it is so effective in itself.** Why should we develop and afford the

luxury of representing everything we do to ourselves? And when we Westerners desire to reflect about all our social relations and think out this or that functions of our actions, it turns often out that most of these functions are highly particular, cover the least of the effects our actions really have.

As far as I can understand intentionality of communication, it may or may not be the case, and it may or may not change overt behavior of a (sender) communicator, but it is relevant for the receiver *\*only if it changes the senders behavior\**. If we were able to decide in any particular case of communicative interaction whether this was so or not, I would be glad to accept intentionality as a scientific concept. This decision seems not possible, as far as I can see, neither for humans nor for animals.

So I can fully agree with Mike T. when he says with the larger number of ethologists that natural and cultural sign are fundamentally the same, but I do not agree when he and Gary convene that the difference, whether for animals or humans, lies in actively or intentionally using signs to influence their worlds. Those are phenomenological categories that are difficult to extract from their context. There must be a better, more general construction to understand that difference. It is upon us to construct. I feel I have an astonishingly simple semiotic conception for that and I wonder whether it will work.

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## 7.12. Date: Mon, 13 Jan 92 16:40:28 GMT

From: "Michael.Carrithers" <M.B.Carrithers@durham.ac.uk>  
Subject: Reply to Nature/Culture (still pretty long)  
To: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang) Cc: xlhc@ucsd.edu (xlhc)

Dear Alfred,

I think perhaps the best way I have so far seen of handling this question of intentionality is one which regards it in a quite technical sense as having nothing very much to do with the ordinary English word 'intention'. In this sense---see Daniel Dennett's *\*The Intentional Stance\** or, for a clear exposition in brief, his article in Byrne and Whiten's *\*Machiavellian Intelligence\**---intentionality is something that is a consequence of representation. (I wish you could stop me if you know all this...) If I react tropically to something that is 0th order intentionality, if I just plain think of something that is 1st order. It gets interesting with 2nd order: I *\*think\** that you *\*think\** something. There is some anecdotal evidence for 3rd order intentionality in other social primates---A *\*thinks\** that B *\*thinks\** that A *\*thinks\** something or other, and this power seems to underlie some considerable powers of deception. But humans seem to do it best, most often, and to greatest effect. We can carry on to higher orders, and Jonathan Bennett has made much of this in various writings (*\*Linguistic Behaviour\**), and indeed makes in a very persuasive way the case that human conversational speech is predicated on at least the



speaker knowing that the listener knows that the speaker is about to utter something aimed at the listener. This relates closely to Grice and to the idea that the primary use of the word 'mean' is 'what do \*you\* mean?' rather than 'what does this word mean?'

I have an embarrassing sense of teaching my grandmother to suck eggs, but I will continue...

NOw this way of thinking does not solve the mystery of the code-like character of human speech, but it does set it in perspective. For it means that when we humans understand an act of speech (or, as Sperber and Wilson suggest, a mere hint of a gesture), we are doing something of awesome intellectual power: we are reading minds. Not perfectly, not as a matter of receiving messages a la a telegraph, but rather as a matter of a more or less reliable, yet more or less imaginative, act of interpretation. If we want to find that ineffable spark, that coconut that fell on Man's head, it is this power of social intelligence---and of course it need not be represented as a quantum leap, but only as something gradual, incremental, and therefore more understandable.

If we look then at the evolutionary scenario implicit here, it is one in which the point of selective pressure is not the predator-prey relationship, not the organism-inanimate relationship, but the conspecific-conspecific relationship. And why not? Most of the intricate things we do we do with each other (though we are now bedazzled by what we do to everything else as well). In this sense the contribution--or is it selective misquotation?---of Vygotsky is his recognition that social phenomena can \*lead\* mental ones.

Let me take this just one step further. The reliability of this process is comforting, and it seems to have worked pretty well. But it may be that it worked even better just because it was not modelled on communication---the conduit metaphor of speech--and so allowed, indeed required, a continuously applied effort of imagination as a spice, a flavouring light or heavy, in every interaction. One direction in which such continual interpretation leads is towards what Max Weber ominously called 'unintended consequences', social outcomes beyond the plans (the intentions in an ordinary English sense) of parties to the action. But often these outcomes are more positive than negative, lead to more complexity and to productive rather than destructive results, and so we make more and more sociocultural machines with more and more impressive sociocultural results. And sometimes, of course, we use continual interaction and interpretation to make something quite remarkable and more or less intended, e.g. agricultural futures markets (I don't say they'r good, I just say they \*are\*).

Now I can't say---I don't have the learning---to say how this will be made to relate to the code-like facet of speech or its analogues, or to a theory of signs. But I do have a suggestion which goes with your own instinct, which is to add something to semiotics. As it stands, the clutch of thought skills centering on semiotics---I know

it better from structuralism in anthropology---has achieved its power by setting a very great deal into the \*ceteris paribus\* conditions and using the consequent freedom to cultivate a certain rigour. So far so good. The only problem has been that the rigour sooner or later---rather like mathematical economics---escapes that niggling sense of correspondence to quotidian experience that even our wildest inventions must sometimes heed. So we need to restore something from the ceteris paribus conditions, and that something is, I think, a vivid sense of the interlocutors of signs, and of the peculiar consequences for signs of their being used by people \*on\* people and \*to\* people. Roy Harris somewhere sets out in passing the case of a man who asks a friend if he can borrow five pounds. What does the man want in response to this request? A word? A sign? Somehow neither of those quite cover it.

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### **7.13. Date: Tue, 14 Jan 1992 06:10 EST**

From: GIVE PEAS A CHANCE \*LBRYNES@vax.clarku.edu\*  
Subject: zoosemiotics  
To: XLCHC@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

Just a note--

A particularly coincidental and exciting exchange...we are just in the midst of designing a "communication" installation. (at the New England Science Center) The 'discourse' at program planning sessions has been quite amazing with the zookeepers determined that a chem/bio reductionism is the REAL and cog./semiotic folk trying in earnest to communicate aspects of complexity.

The installation & programming involves inter/intra species comm. & comm with eco and social environments.. ANY thoughts/refs would be greatly appreciated!!!

On Mike's moth. There's a specific moth ear mite who settles eggs in the moth referred to. However, if there were eggs in both ears, the bat would have supper. The female ear mite leaves a trail to one ear only (usually the right one, I think) and mites follow, leaving one ear clear for hearing and avoidance patterns.

Lois  
NESC  
Worcester, MA

**7.14. Date: 92-01-15 05:38:45 MEZ**

From: PO61170%DHHUNI4.bitnet@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU  
Subject: Natural and Cultural mediation / semiosis  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

In the following I would like to take part in the discussion between Alfred Lang, Michael Carrithers, Gary Shank and Mike Tomasello about the difference of human cultural mediation compared with the amazing feats that we now know animals like monkeys and apes are capable of. I also want to remind ourselves of a much earlier message by Donald Norman (sent on Tuesday, 8 Oct 1991) on "symbolic thought". This was the first longer mention of Dennett's analysis of intentionality in this network, and Don has added the criterion of "composability" of a sign-system (drawing on Newell's most recent book) besides the higher level of intentionality to distinguish human symbolic thought from animal thinking. Composability is indeed very important, as I believe, and the question is: How did it come about? Don has told us of the book by Merlin Donald: "Origins of the Modern Mind: Three stages in the evolution of culture and cognition" (which I still could not get hold of). Maybe there is a solution for this riddle already. I will use results of my own studies of the phylogeny of symbols here.

Alfred has made it clear that he would not deny the apparent difference between natural and cultural mediation (given that the latter is a "daughter" of the former, i.e. a late developmental product considering phylogenetic time spans), but he is wanting clearer criteria than the intentionality of the sign-makers, or the level of necessary "mindreading" (what a remarkable new word to use, btw).

Main point: Communication builds on Perception and Production

Reading signs is simply what we mean by cognition, in some sense. Mike Tomasello wrote this (Fri, 10 Jan 92). Gary Shank used an example from the field normally called "perception". However, most of the research in this field is based on "stimulus-response" or "information" theories, and a semiotic treatment is very rare (does anyone know of one?). I think this a very promising perspective, and like Gary would start with Jakob von Uexku:ll's work on Umwelten.

The most interesting aspect of Uexku:ll's sign theory is his distinction of "Merkzeichen" (perceptual signs) and "Wirkzeichen" (effectual signs). The latter I construe as a subset of the former showing the distinguishing feature of having been brought about by the perceiving animal itself via an action in its "environment" (in the strong subject-centered sense of eco-niche or Umwelt). Thus, I may produce an effectual sign of my own movement (specified as expansion of my visual field, as Gibson has explained) by walking a bit. This changes where I stand, it is a \*production of a new position\*, and may be perceived by any observer as an intentional movement.

It is surely unusual to talk about body movements as production, mainly because they leave no permanent products (save for footprints and other physically enduring traces). Nevertheless I believe it is important to talk like this, because the inference of an intention presupposes in an important way that the phenomenon in question is an effectual sign of self's action for it/him/herself.

Accordingly, we could look at the \*production side\* of signs and non-signs for the distinctive features of cultural mediation. With this I do not simply mean intentionality. On the contrary, a human or animal production also signifies when not designed to do so. E.g. if one looks into a beaver's valley from a mountain-top one sees a kind of regularity that signifies that this is >beaver land<. Only details of this have been produced with intentionality.

These kind of semiotic entities might be called "physiognomic signs" of an eco-world, e.g. of a complex motion of an animal herd in its own country. Think of American Buffalo some 20 or 30 thousand years before our age. It is a clear sign for us, no doubt also for the eagles, the wolves and the pumas...

Yet, these animals are not able to stage mimetically what they have seen on their journeys for the benefit of those that stayed at the home-base of the reproductive unit (a monogamic pair with young ones in the eagle's nest; a pack with leading males and females and other members of nearest kinship degrees with the wolves). In the case of humans this seems to be the decisive step to symbolic communication of the first degree, namely using

\* dramatical signs, as I have called any mimetic staging of an event before and for an audience (or group of perceivers/observers).

Everyone of us is able to "talk" with living beings using those physiognomic signs of landscapes, animal motion, and plant structures in case we really need to: e.g.

\* in very foreign country, like China would be for me where I just see that those figures are signs but have no inkling of what they might refer to, and where nearly no words are recognizable at first;

\* with severely handicapped children or patients when other (should we avoid "higher"?) channels of communication are not available;

\* when talking to our pet or domestic animals -- people just do this naturally, disregarding the seeming impossibility of the theoretical psychologist...

Another point: There \*is\* something in human evolution that is really new: sharing food and other means for life among a larger group where kinship has no priority over friendship, and where very old men and women have a special, cherished status. Niels Engelsted of Kopenhagen University, who is also on this network, has written a detailed story about the emergence of what he calls the societal relation

between humans. We are mediated with one another by the exchange of goods, among them also things that are "pure symbols" (a tool for my garden is not a pure symbol, even though it signifies a lot about me and my background in the way I hold it, use it, and so on). Niels' article will appear soon in the Multidisciplinary Newsletter for Activity Theory.

One might still argue that it is only a matter of degree. Aren't the buffalos and wolf packs also in some way "societies" in this sense, if only we see them as co-species of the ecosystem? -- No, no, no, (I would say emphatically,) please consider the very different speed of phylo- and sociogenesis: A million years perhaps humans used their very own mimetic language (made possible by their bipedy); spoken syntactical language might not be older than 100 thousand years; pictorial signs emerged in parallel with an exponential grow in numbers of stone tools about 30 thousand years ago. The numerical signs (numbers of but two or three kinds, as we know them today) aren't much older than 10.000 years, and so on. (See the work of Andre+ Leroi-Gourhan or Friedhart Klix on the history of symbol systems).

Symbols are made for exchange. Exchange among humans is incomparably richer and more diverse than in any animal species nowadays. But all of this rests on our natural ability to read physiognomic signs in nature and in culture.

A final point: While the young Wittgenstein believed like Ernst Mach that the elementary symbols in science must be the sense data of the individual, around 1930 he made a U-turn and looked at the physiognomic signs in the body movements of other humans as best candidates for the basic language of us all (this, at least, is what Jaakko and Merrill Hintikka have found out in their "Investigations on Wittgenstein"). It fits so well with my dramatic signs that I think it must have been like this. Wishful thinking?

Arne.

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**7.15. Date: Wed, 15 Jan 92 15:53:14 GMT**

From: "Michael.Carrithers" <M.B.Carrithers@durham.ac.uk>

Subject: Signs, pointing, and sociality (long ish)  
Cc: xlchc@ucsd.edu (xlchc)

Arne,

I found your message on signs, physiognomic, effectual, and mimetic, very stimulating. Let me reply with just one of the many trains of thought it set off.

About halfway down you make a leap. On one side of the divide are effectual and physiognomic signs, signs which are modelled, so far as I can see, on a scenario in which a member of one species (humans, pumas) are observing members of another (beavers, buffalo). On the other side of the divide are what I suppose must be mimetic signs, set in a scenario of conspecifics signing to one another \*about\*---there's that pesky intentionality---something else. And that leap, you make clear---and I certainly agree---covers the territory of interest. So what lies in that territory?

Consider the case of pointing. It is evidently species-specific to humans (Premack and Premack, \*The Mind of an Ape\*, and see also cognate arguments by Tomasello, Kruger and Ratner---Mike T. just sent it to me), and it develops very early in childhood. George Butterworth blithely says (in his article in Whiten, ed. *Natural Theories of Mind*) that it is 'thought to be intimately linked to language acquisition', which seems unexceptionable: but what if it, or something like it, is linked to the phylogeny of speaking as well?

From Butterworth's article---and from my own, totally amateur observations of my 18-month old---it seems clear that pointing has two temporally as well as logically distinct components. The first is the engagement of the other's attention, as for example through direct gaze. And it seems fair to say that this 'pre' may be marked or unmarked. It could, I suppose, be achieved by a vocalization or by making a sound (tapping on the glass...) as well as by gesture. Or gaze may already be established.

Then comes the good bit: A \*points\* at something---a zebra? A cuddly toy? Whatever. And B looks at...the zebra, not the finger. This is the brilliant bit, because we come equipped to do it, whereas chimpanzees, though they may learn it from human trainers or idiosyncratically happen on it as individuals, just do not produce pointing as a matter of course.

This is, then, a pivotal point (sic). What would you call it? It's a physiognomic sign, but one which has been brought within the ambit of sociality, of conspecific behaviour. It certainly seems much more like a (Saussurean) sign than any you or Alfred have mentioned. And it is noticeable that it already requires two swift displacements of attention---as well as a third, because the pointer may be pointing, not at the zebra, but at the zebra's rather leisurely gait, say, or at the way it is moving toward a lion hidden upwind that the zebra itself cannot see. The finger, like an utterance, has no fixed and certain subject matter apart from its setting.

Now what I like about this scenario is that it seems to give space to both the considerations you wish to emphasize---the sign- or symbol-like character of human thought-in-action---as well as those I wish to emphasize, the intersubjectivity of that thought. And it seems clearly to be both more rudimentary than the mimesis which you set out and more complex than the cognate social mammal behaviours.

Where could we go from here? Well, one way we could go is toward temporal and intellectual complexity. A has already got B to do three things---attend, look, and imagine. Maybe A---following Premack's notion of humans' *\*pedagogy\** according to an *\*aesthetic standard\**---would wish to bring B's attention back to a gesture---shall we say, to a mimetic gesture? The flow of action would insured the topic more or less, so A could, say, imitate rhythmically the gait of the zebra with his whole body, or else vocalize in time to that gait. Or maybe even---I'm embarrassed by the unsophistication of this idea---A could vocalize something equivalent to what he had pointed to, e.g. WHAMMY, that's the end of that zebra! (He says `zzrrrrk' while drawing his finger across his own neck...) It would still be up to B to make the relevant interpretation, but we're talking here about animals who have time to spend socializing, and who have brain cells to spare. Later some of what had happened here could be retrieved---perhaps only the gesture and the vocalization, without pointing or bothering to find a zebra to point at--- in another setting, for the delectation of others.

Sorry to reinvent the wheel, and sorrier even to set it in Africa. But there are messages which go with the scenario which add a great deal to the theory. I've recently been reminded of a piece of research carried out by Blurton Jones and Konner on the !Kung. They noted that the !Kung hunters seem to observe the behaviour of wildlife in extraordinary detail and spend a great deal of time recounting that behaviour, whether or not it is directly relevant to the hunt. This seems to have all the developments that we would like to see from that primeval scenario. There is a social scene, around the fire at night, quite divorced from the actual hunt itself yet intimately concerned with it. There is the shared experience, but a shared experience which goes beyond the individual experience of any participant. There are the young, listening avidly. There is the social/material reproduction, or at least one part of the nutritional part of reproduction, as well as the extra, artistic/aesthetic bit, the representational, mimetic bit, the sheer, direct enjoyment of re-enactment, imitation, caricature, and vivid speech. I make these last points because there must be some emotional charge attached to representation, just as there is to interacting with each other in the first place. (Ian Hacking, in his book *\*Representing and INtervening\** makes some enigmatic but apparently profound comments about representation that are worth scratching your head over.)

Let me finally make a more abstract point about the pointing finger. One way of thinking about what is entailed in the finger as a sign is that it is a *\*production\**, as you put it, which incites to meta-thought, to what the finger points at, not to the

finger. On the one hand, I would want to insist that a constitutive part of that incitement is the receiver's, the pointee's, cognition that it is directed at him or her. Without that cognition, there is much less, perhaps no, incitement to search the search space more widely. So the 'pre' is necessary, if not sufficient, to the interpretation. And second, there are further levels of meta-thought (I take the idea, if not the term, from Premack's article in *Thought without Language*) that might be suggested by the finger. Perhaps the gesture points to a quotation, or at least a quotation in an extended sense, as for example when A points out to be a particularly delectable dance step executed by C, a dance step reminiscent both of an emu and yet of the previous dancer. The example occurs to me because we are not only good at a wide range of particular practices, material and aesthetic, but also of devising meta- and meta-meta- languages to talk about practices, and many of those consciousnesses about practice or consciousnesses about consciousness can be evoked by a simple gesture. And in any case, for these more comprehensive and more abstracted signs to achieve their end, they require a correspondingly comprehensive and complex sense by the interlocutors of who they are.

### **7.16. Date: Tue, 24 Mar 92 14:03:18 -0800**

From: mcole@weber.UCSD.EDU (Mike Cole)  
Subject: Pierce/Piaget  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

From time to time here folks mumble about culture and semiotics and Piaget and Vygotsky and Lewin and Dewey and.....

Anyhoood, I am preparing for a grad course in the intellectual history of Communication and I re-ran across the following classic tidbit from Pierce. In light of recent discussions, mostly on xact, where the issue of the relation between mediation and activity has been bubbling, it struck me that one could take this Peircian formulation (sorry for the Pierce in the subject line) to refer Piaget or Vygotsky under one or another interpretation of the term, mediation.

In "The Architecture of Theories, we get the following:

First is the conception of being or existing independent of anything else. Second is conception of being relative to, the conception of reaction with, something else. Third is the conception of mediation, whereby the first and second are brought into relation.

I am sure that several of you have already thought this through. Its a new connection for me. It reads a lot like a slightly simplified Piagetian genetic epistemology.

Yes? No?



mike

**7.17. Date: Wed, 25 Mar 92 14:03:49 -0800**

From: Gary Shank via: mcole@weber.UCSD.EDU (Mike Cole)  
Subject: re: Peirce/Piaget/LSV  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Forwarded for Gary

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Talk about your can of worms, Mike-- the fascinating thing about Peirce is his tendency to write books as paragraphs. The piece from Architecture of Theories is no exception. Let me attempt a little preliminary un-packing, and if people are interested, we can go on.

Piaget and Vygotsky certainly are kindred spirits to Peirce, but I'm not sure that they broke ranks with the modern philosophical tradition to the extent that Peirce did. It is impossible to get at Peirce's mindset unless you keep two things about him in mind at all times:

1) Peirce started out as a deep lover of Kant (whose ideas are the basis of cognitive science, IMHO). Then, he chose to refute Kant, but realized that he could not really refute Kant until he refuted Descartes. The refutation of Kant moves Peirce away from any belief in structures/schema and toward hypothetical structures of knowledge only;

2) The refutation of Descartes is more fundamental. Here, Peirce is rejecting the role of epistemology as the foundation of a science of cognition-- a role that it has in Piaget, Vygotsky, Cognitive Science, and almost any other model of cognition in psychology. Peirce not only opted away from epistemology to ontology, but he also rejected the idea that either epistemology or ontology is foundational--instead, he opted for a speculative metaphysics. In plain terms, what this means is that for Peirce, our grasp of being is not a matter of knowing or perceiving, but of believing and inferring from hypothetical starting places. Both pragmatism and semiotics, Peirce's twin brainchildren, have the character of being methods of understanding that just start in the middle of experience instead of seeking foundations, either deductively or inductively.

This is my attempt to lay out the 'ground rules' for tackling the ideas that have been cited. why dont I field any questions here, before moving onto the substance of the quote? Or else, we can just put a merciful end to all this if need be ;-)

gary

**7.18. Date: Wed, 25 Mar 92 19:12:33 -0800**

From: mcole@weber.UCSD.EDU (Mike Cole)  
Subject: Piercing Peirce  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Thanks to all who have commented on the Peirce questions I raised. I am mindful of the pitfalls of overinterpretation, but the affinities did strike me powerfully, in part owing to Arne's prior message in xact on mediation, as I wrote earlier.

Unlike some, I gather, I find such family resemblances a stimulus to thought. This is not to seek perfect matches or rigid distinctions. But that fact that Peirce found it necessary explicitly to reject Kant, and then to reject Descartes, seems to me to provide an interesting way to triangulate on Piaget/Vygotsky/Lewin/Dewey/etc. In this regard, I am scouring my files for an article by A. Reithel in which the family trees dangling from the toes of Hegel are sketched out.

Arne- What is the official reference to the article in which your kinship diagram is located?

mike

**7.19. Date: 92-03-26 02:43:35 MEZ**

From: PO61170%DHHUNI4.bitnet@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU  
Subject: Peirce quote  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

The quote from Peirce in my mind should not be read as an account of a concrete developmental sequence. Rather it is kind of a genetical and logical series of concepts: Any text on such issues has to start somewhere, developing from some common understanding, capturing what is somehow evident, and going on from there.

Gary Shank rightly stressed the different stance with regard to grounding that Peirce took. However, I do not think it wise to discuss Vygotsky as philosopher (which he wasn't in his own image of himself) together with Piaget (who surely had some ambitions as epistemologist and much more time to think and write).

It is very hard indeed to discuss this on e-mail, without a good comparative text as common base (which does not exist). I would rather like some notes on what we might make of Peirce's texts today (or Vygotsky's or Piaget's -- there have been no quotes lately), because according to his pragmatic maxime the meaning of them is only to be found in what follows (dia-)logically from them.

Arne.

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**7.20. Date: 92-03-26 10:55:58 MEZ**

From: PO61170%DHHUNI4.bitnet@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU  
Subject: hhistorical diagram  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

The diagram "historical connections among philosophical authors" appears in a new book: Christiane Floyd, Heinz Zuellighoven, Reinhard Budde, and Reinhard Keil-Slawik (Editors): Software Development and Reality Construction. Berlin/Heidelberg/New York etc: Springer Verlag 1992.

ISBN for US edition: 0-387-54349.

My chapter there (pp 391-415) is entitled:  
Activity Theory as a Foundation for Design  
one of five chapters in the section  
Epistemological Approaches to Informatics.

There is however no explicit comparison between Peirce and Vygotsky and Piaget there. At that time I had barely scratched the surface of Peircean semiotics and philosophy, and I am still not very much deeper regarding the volumes of Peirceania still unknown to me.

But one thing seems clear to me: Peirce did not regard himself as psychologist, while both Piaget and Vygotsky did very much so. Just wanted to say that we should bear this in mind; did not want to erect barriers against creative appropriation of conceptual distinctions...

Arne.

=====

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**7.21. Date: Thu, 26 Mar 92 08:29:34 -0800**

From: Jim Wertsch Via: mcole@weber.UCSD.EDU (Mike Cole)  
Subject: re: mediation  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Jim hit "r" on this message, which I am forwarding at his request.

mike

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Mike-

A focus on mediated action as a unit of analysis by no means indicates that phenomena at the level of Leont'ev's activity are kept out of the analysis. Instead, it seems to me that activity settings and so forth are reflected and created in the mediational means employed in action. In a sense, the focus on action is similar to Bakhtin's focus on the utterance and his insistence that the utterance is the basic phenomenon to be examined and that other levels and interests can derive from it.

In the end, my focus on action is not so much motivated by a rejection of the level activity as it is a reflection of the opinion that for me at least I have not seen what activity as a level of analysis buys one WITHOUT starting with mediated action. I am certainly interested in understanding how human action is connected to the institutionally, historically, and culturally shaped forms of activity that Leont'ev and others would focus on, but these are best reached in a Vygotskian/Bakhtinian analysis in my view via mediated action.

Jim Wertsch  
JWERTSCH@CLARKU

**7.22. Date: Mon, 30 Mar 92 08:17:47 -0800**

From: Jaromir janousek Via: mcole@weber.UCSD.EDU (Mike Cole)  
Subject: more mediated action  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Mike,

many thanks for adding me to xact. I am enclosing a short remark. Decide, please, if it is worth forwarding it further.

Jarek

Jim Wertsch's parallel between action and utterance as the unit of analysis is very crucial one. It seems to me that both the Vygotskian mediated action and Bakhtin's utterance (or double-voiced word) should be taken more as necessary clues or keys for finding out - opening the kernel (content, meaning etc.) of units than as complete

units as such. The mediated action or the utterance is the necessary but not sufficient component of the relevant unit.

Let us take it from another side. In category systems - for example at Bales - the units are a priori and generally defined and the concrete actions and/or interactions are to be subsumed into them. This subsumption represents at the same time the classification of relevant actions concerning their content. As Bales says, the unit of behavior to be classified is defined in this system in part circularly, that is by the category system itself. The very process of this classification at Bales is to classify the behavior of the actor in terms of its significance for the recipient or viewer of the act. It is a kind of the comparison of the actor's and recipient's standpoints within their relation and the inference from it.

Let us take now the situation where no a priori category system is at our disposal. Making use of the analysis of the mediated action means to infer from two comparisons and relations: of the tool toward the object of the activity and of the tool toward the other participant of the activity. In a similar way making use of the analysis of the utterance means also to infer from two comparisons and relations: of the word toward the object of the speech and toward another person's speech. Thanks to Vygotsky and Bakhtin new possibilities for inner ongoing analysis of activity and discourse streams appear. But that is another story.

Jaromir Janousek

### **7.23. Date: Tue, 31 Mar 1992 08:04 EST**

From: JWERTSCH@CLARKU.BitNet  
Subject: mediated action  
To: xlchc@UCSD.BITNET

I agree with Jaromir Janousek's comments that making a parallel between mediated action in a Vygotskian analysis and the utterance in Bakhtin's approach is only a beginning and not an ironclad definition. I also believe, however, that too tight of a definition, such as the one Bales posed, often limits the possibilities for proceeding very far into complex issues from the perspective of a particular unit of analysis. In the end, some kind of hermeneutic circle must be involved between a general theoretical framework and the unit of analysis it requires.

Jim Wertsch

JWERTSCH@CLARKU

### **7.24. Date: 92-03-31 23:01:01 MEZ**

From: PO61170%DHHUNI4.BITNET@vm.gmd.de  
Subject: Actions and beyond

To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

While there are some that write long epistles like me sometimes, Jim Wertsch has the irritating attitude of being much too short.

Jim: I understood Jarek's example of the Bales categories as one simple example of circular definition ("hermeneutical" as some say because of historical priority). You seem to propose the circle between activity as empirical unit and theoretical framework as something more profound. But why?

And, regarding the apparently quite confusing "activity level" of Leontyev, taken as "upper context unit" of analysis: is it possible to reach it "from above", i.e. in contrast to your strategy of centering on the actions, and proceeding from there?

The category of "societal mediatedness" that German Critical Psychology has developed in my view is a possible example. It has been derived from a dialectical and historical materialist analysis, and has then been used as a framework for understanding action as subjectively grounded choices from objectively existing possibilities.

Does this make sense outside of Germany?

Arne Raeithel  
U of Hamburg.

## **7.25. Date: Wed, 1 Apr 1992 08:29 EST**

From: JWERTSCH@CLARKU.BitNet  
Subject: response to Arne  
To: xlchc@UCSD.BITNET

I think it is certainly possible to take Leont'ev's activity level as an upper context unit of analysis and that one can reach it from above (in contrast to centering on action and proceeding from there). This is indeed an important enterprise, but it has as its focus something that is best done in social theory, history, and sociology. I believe the genius of Vygotsky/Leont'ev/ Bakhtin (at least the last would probably not like to be grouped with the other two, actually) is that they were not hamstrung by American disciplinary boundaries. However, it is still quite legitimate to focus on psychological processes, and that is what taking mediated action as a unit of analysis seems to allow one to do. Sometimes activity theory is taken to be a call for the disbanding of psychology in favor of sociology or some such think, but I think the point is to integrate levels of analysis in a principled way. By focusing on mediated action, my intent is to focus on psychological processes while at the same time keeping open the necessity of tying such processes to sociocultural processes.

Jim Wertsch

JWERTSCH@CLARKU

**7.26. Date: Wed, 1 Apr 92 08:36:31 -0800**

From: mcole@weber.UCSD.EDU (Mike Cole)  
Subject: top down/bottom up  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Jim, Arne, et al.-

I am have a lot of difficulty holding steady the distinctions that are being made. I think that I think that there is a very large area of agreement and some distinctions that are both fine grained and a matter of starting point and goals of analysis as well as objects.

As I see it, everyone agrees that one must attend to:

1. Mediational means
2. activity/cultural practice/event
3. Larger scale structuration of a socio-political-economic kind
4. Genetic analysis

In short, this comes out similar to the lists of key characteristics of AT discussed on xact. Might it be useful to pull the summary products of that discussion up into xlchc or should we move this topic "down" into xact? Mixing the levels (I am at fault here for mixing topics via my Peirce not, but others contribute by answering messages at different levels-e.g. Jim is answering an xact note from Arne on xlchc) has got to add to confusion for those seeing only part of the discussion.

Vis a vis Jim's note. In the 1985 Wertsch volume on cognition and communication I argued for people acting in settings (with mediational means) as a proper unit of analysis because it is simultaneously the most "macro" level attended to by psychologists (I referred here to Katherine Nelson, Roger Shank, David Rumelhart, .....) and the most "micro" level attended to by anthropologists/sociologists (here I found Nadel and Fortes especially interesting, but others could be cited). I take this to be a version of the position that Jim proposes at the start of his message. However, as noted in a prior note, my ideas were criticized for not making mediation central enough.

The fact of the matter is that we cannot keep all sides of the helix of life in mind at one time. Our goals, starting points, and objects of analysis all afford different insights. The gigantic challenge is to coordinate them to get at "the larger picture." Or so I believe.

How might we make progress toward greater mutual understanding?

mike

### **7.27. Date: Mon, 06 Apr 92 00:00 CDT**

From: P30GDS1@NIU.BITNET  
Subject: Mike's insights about Peirce  
To: XLCHC@UCSD.EDU

A few days ago, Mike raised a very good question-- what is the link, if any, between Peirce and Piaget/Vygotsky. I made the obligatory move of disclaiming any serious notion of Peirce as a psychologist, in deference to Peirce's own vehement insistence that he was inter-ested in describing reality, not psychological states of knowing reality. but I left the the discussion prematurely due to pressing work, and I'd like to finish the thread briefly.

Peirce was adamant that his semiotic was not a psychological model, but it follows that certainly psychology is a special case of reality, and so there ought to be a Peircean based psychology at least in principle. Very little work has been done on such a psychology, since, as Alfred Lang has pointed out in readings that he was kind enough to send me, a semiotic model of psychology is necessarily post-Cartesian. The Cartesian mind-body problem is so fundamental to the thinking of most psychologists that to let it go creates an existential crisis of the first order. But I think that Piaget and certainly Vygotsky moved in a post Cartesian direction in their work, and these moves moved them closer to the general model of signs posited by Peirce.

What I would like to suggest is that there are two works that move both Piaget and Vygotsky closer to Peircean semiotic. The first is an important masterwork, sadly not cited nearly enough, by David McNeill. *\*The Conceptual Basis of Language\** was published in 1979, and in this work, McNeill shows that all conceptual structures in language can be tied to the Piagetian sensorimotor mode of thinking. His first chapter is a profound illustration of the role of action in the formation of basic cognitive structures. The second work is more famous; *\*Metaphors We Live By\** by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. They make a similar case, but their approach is more Vygotskian, in its insistence in a mode of embodied cognition that creates an experiential mode of cognition between the idealist subjectivism and the materialist objectivism that have dominated psychological theory for centuries. This embodied cognition model is developed more clearly by Johnson in a later book entitled *\*The Body in the Mind\**, while Lakoff charts out contextual semantics in language in his *\*Woiemn, Fire, and Dangerous Things\**. Lakoff was a student of Sebeok, who is a noted semiotican. Sebeok was a student of Charles Morris, who developed a behavioral semiotic, and Morris was a student of Dewey. The final link falls into place when we realize that Peirce, during his isngle brief



stint in an academic job, taught at Johns Hopkins when Dewey was a student there and clearly influenced the young Dewey.

The interweaving of these thinkers and their texts suggests that Mike's intuitions are correct, and that actual work is ongoing that will eventually bring about a post Cartesian convergence of thought with the work of Piaget and Vygotsky. Or else, I'm out on a limb with a saw and no ladder...

One final unrelated thought...I'm currently researching a review article for a book on the Catholic heritage in American psychology, and I've come across the work of Thomas Verner Moore. Moore wrote a number of fascinating books, including *\*Image and Meaning in Learning and Perception\** and *\*Cognitive Psychology.\** The interesting part is that the *Cognitive Psychology* book was written in 1939, and the *Image and Meaning* book was written in 1919. Now that we are in a postmodern age, I think the time has come for us to realize, document, and explore the diversities that exist in our field. Fr. Moore might be just the place to start. Does anyone else know anything about his work? I'd love some references, etc. Time to cease rambling...

Gary Shank, NIU

### **7.28. Date: Tue, 7 Apr 92 14:24:13 -0700**

From: mcole@weber.UCSD.EDU (Mike Cole)  
Subject: sense and meaning  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

"The word absorbs intellectual and affective content from the entire context in which it is intertwined. It begins to mean both more and less than it does when we view it in isolation. It means more because the scope of its meaning is expanded; it acquires several zones that supplement this new content. It means less because the abstract meaning of the word is restricted and narrowed to what the word designates in this single context. LSV. T&S.; 1987. p. 276.

### **7.29. Date: Fri, 10 Apr 92 08:29:43 ADT**

From: HUNT000 <HUNT%UNB.CA@UNBMVS1.csd.unb.ca>  
Subject: sense and meaning  
To: <xlchc@ucsd.edu>

Here's a response to Mike's quotation from LSV about sense and meaning, and words in context:

The sentence, like the word, is a signifying unit of language. Therefore, each individual sentence, for example, "the sun has risen," is completely comprehensible, that is, we understand its language meaning, its possible role in an utterance. . . . if this sentence were surrounded by context, then it would

acquire a fullness of its own sense only in this context, that is, only in the whole of the utterance, and one could respond only to this entire utterance. . . . If our sentence figures as a completed utterance, then it acquires its own integral sense under the particular concrete circumstances of speech communication. (M. Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," Speech Genres & Other Late Essays, 1986.)

I was told at a conference recently, incidentally, that there may be actual historic connections between the American Pragmatists and the Russia where Vygotsky and Bakhtin were active, if not directly with LSV and MMB; apparently John Dixon published a note in a recent TLS suggesting it. But I haven't had a chance to check on it. Anybody else know about that?

-- Russ

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                                _~|__
Russell A. Hunt                _~|__)_ __)~|__          BITNET: hunt@unb
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### 7.30. Date: Thu, 16 Apr 92 12:30:58 -0700

From: mcole@weber.UCSD.EDU (Mike Cole)  
 Subject: next turn  
 To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

In response to my posting of an interesting comment of vygotsky's on thought and word, Russ Hunt posted the following from Bakhtin:

The sentence, like the word, is a signifying unit of language. Therefore, each individual sentence, for example, "the sun has risen," is completely comprehensible, that is, we understand its language meaning, its possible role in an utterance. . . . if this sentence were surrounded by context, then it would acquire a fullness of its own sense only in this context, that is, only in the whole of the utterance, and one could respond only to this entire utterance. . . . If our sentence figures as a completed utterance, then it acquires its own integral sense under the particular concrete circumstances of speech communication. (M. Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," Speech Genres & Other Late Essays, 1986.)

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The two sets of quotations (I do not have the LSV handy, sorry) nice raise issues of units of analysis and Jim Wertsch's linking of Bakhtin and Vygotsky. Jim also has

cited Bateson in connection with issues of context, and I thought that the following Bateson comment might be of interest.

On the relationship between context and content:

A phoneme exists as such only in combination with other phonemes which make up a word. The word is the \*context\* of the phoneme. But the word only exists as such--only "has meaning"--in the larger context of the utterance, which again has meaning only in a relationship.

This hierarchy of contexts within contexts is universal for the communicational (or "emic") aspect of phenomena and drives the scientist always to seek for explanation in the ever larger units. (Steps to an ecology of mind, p. 402)."

mike

Michael Cole

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University of California, La Jolla, California, 92093

### **7.31. Date: Tue, 21 Apr 1992 17:02:50 +0200**

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch  
Subject: Mediation: meaning, context...  
To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet

Mike and others,

Mediation, or sense and meaning, content and context.

For the sake of complementing and perhaps sharpening the recent quotations from Vygotsky and Bakhtin related by Mike Cole and Russ Hunt I would like to quote and comment upon a sentence or two of Peirce:

"I say that no sign can be understood -- or at least that not proposition can be understood -- unless the interpreter has `collateral acquaintance` with every Object of it." (CP 8.183)

Now there are two types of `collaterals`: (a) of indexical nature that refer to the real objects referred to; (b) of iconic nature that refer to possible characters of the possible objects referred to by the signs in a proposition.

So if somebody says: "what a wonderful morning" or "the sun has risen", that means nothing as long as you do not assume that the speaker refers to to-day or some other specified occasion, and it is equally empty, if you know nothing about

mornings, wonders, sunrises etc. However, "... it is quite impossible that a collateral observation [or knowledge, AL], however it might be eked out by imagination or thought, should ever approach a positive idea of a singular, let alone an individual; that is, that we should actually think it as determinate in each one of the more than millions of respects in which things may vary." (Ms. 318, 1907, quoted from Pape, H. (1991) Not every Object of a sign has being. *Transact. Peirce Soc.* 27 141-178)

Peirce`s point is that \_symbols\_ in general (words, sentences, ...) never refer to the existence but rather and only so to some essence of (a class of) things. The only exception is \_names\_ which refer to the existence of something singular whose essence is open to specification. In order to be meaningful, symbols have to be accompanied by indices (to occasions) and by iconic material (i.e. knowledge).

Is this a helpful contribution to understanding mediation? Take it to open up conceptions of signs.

Alfred Lang

Dienstag, 21. April 1992 14:59 Uhr

Alfred Lang, Professor of Psychology

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## 8. Brussels Congress 1992: 2 / 2

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### 8.1. Date: Sun, 24 May 1992 12:51:23 +0200

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch  
Subject: Brussels Intl. Congress  
To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet

Dear folks, having received note from the Brussels XXV. International Congress of Psychology committee as to the day of my contribution (Thursday July 23, check time and place in the program booklet) I thought it might be nice to meet some of the people on xlchc in person who also happen to visit that conference. So please post a note like this and perhaps an extended summary of your contribution. I put my 130 lines in a separate message (for easy deletion by those not interested).

Alfred Lang

### 8.2. Date: Sun, 24 May 1992 12:53:57 +0200

From: lang@psy.unibe.ch  
Subject: Brussels Long Summary (130 lines)  
To: xlchc@ucsd.BitNet

Extended summary for an oral presentation at the XXV. Intern. Congr. Psychology, Brussels 1992 To be presented on Thursday July 23 in a thematic session, 15 min. presentation and 5 min. discussion Time and place to be taken from the program booklet

Alfred Lang, Psychologisches Institut, t Bern, Schweiz  
Laupenstrasse 4, CH-3008 BERN,  
e-mail: lang@psy.unibe.ch

\*\*Semiotic tools for an isomorphic conception

of perception and action, mind and culture.\*\*

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Psychology has predominantly investigated the influence of "given" entities (stimuli, situations) on people (organisms, minds, responses). With few exceptions, interest in the results of human action is restricted to their indicative function for

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what the stimuli have attained. However, this generalized cause-effect or Fechnerian paradigm dominating the whole discipline is an unrealistically narrow understanding of the human condition.

(1) In fact, major parts and aspects of the human environment are entities produced, and this in a systematic manner, by human action. The relationship between people and their environment is a two-way process. So the influence of people on the world is or should as well be of psychological interest in itself.

(2) On methodological grounds, the strategy of finding the principles governing the so-called mental processes by investigating the effects of stimuli on responses runs all the risks of a circular argument. If what is called RstimuliS is generally not something simply given but rather a product of human action, then the mental organization of the subjects to be investigated is virtually packed into the research paradigm in the form of the mental organization of the investigator. For example, one of the major characters of perceptual-cognitive organization is the figure-ground- or unity formation principle. As a consequence of this we understand stimuli, situations as well as the individual or the organism as elementary units. But this is meaningful only in a restricted sense, because the latter would neither live nor mentally function without continual exchange with its environment and the former, in so far as they are made by humans, are made as units. It is indeed very difficult if not impossible or arbitrary to specify the boundaries of both the individual and the situation; both are in fact relational rather than substance terms and should be treated as such.

(3) The generalized Fechnerian paradigm, in addition, is limited to only a section of the ecological function circle of information exchange between individuals and their environment. Individual ontogenetic development can be conceived of as continuous spiraling series proceeding in sequences of four steps in each circle going from perception to mental processes to action to culture and then starting anew. These steps are presently either practically omitted from systematic psychological interest (culture) or treated among them in quite different and incompatible ways. The conceptual tools for dealing with perceptual or actional or inner-mental processes have few particulars in common.

However, if it is true that perceptual processes result in some transient or lasting structure formation within the mind (memory or psychological organization at large) which then in turn is a crucial determinant of behavior or action of the same individual, it is also true that any action of an individual produces a transient or lasting formation in the environment which can be described in material-energetic and informational terms and which in turn is an important determinant of further perception and action of the same and/or other individuals. Collectively and as an organized whole of objective and symbolic entities these environmental traces of actions are called culture. Whilst perception leaves structures in the mind, action results in a modified environment or evolving culture. Insofar as the internal mind implies characters of the environment and the environment bears traces of the

actors' characters and in turn is indirectly determining other actions, a correspondence between the minds and the external structures is assured. No mind is thinkable without such a relation to the environment, neither is culture conceivable without its corresponding (internal) minds. Culture therefor is aptly described as an Rexternal mindS. Internal and external mind together are a logically inseparable ecological unit in spite of mind and culture being incorporated in different physical structures.

On this background conceptual tools are wanted which enable us to treat the four steps in the ecological unit formation process and to conceive of psychological functioning of the ecological unit in a consistent and systematic manner. In elaborating on Jakob von Uexku:ll's Function-Circle it is proposed to apply triadic semiotics in the tradition of C.S. Peirce to all four steps. Semiosis or triadic sign process is advanced as a candidate for the basic and irreducible psychological process unit suitable to describe structure formation and change both within and between individuals and their cultural surrounds. As a process, semiosis refers to a logically inseparable triad of components which would loose their meaning when separated from the triad and which include exactly a referent or source, an interpretant or mediator, and a representant or result.

The four steps of psychological functioning can briefly be sketched as follows: (a) IntrO-Semiosis or perception: how does a particular structure formation come about in the memory of an individual under the influence of his/her enviroment; (b) IntrA-Semiosis or mental processes, in the widest sense: how does structure change occur within the mind in itself; (c) ExtrO-Semiosis or action: how do living systems attain structure change in their environment; (d) ExtrA-Semiosis or culture processes: how does the environment become and evolve as that relatively coherent complex of meaning, objects and symbols, that assures the functioning of individual and social systems as well as the stability and change in cultural traditions.

Representant of an action is always an external structure which, either as such or after further processing by other people serves as a referent for an ensuing perception. Representants of perceptions are mental structures which in turn serve as referents for action processes. Dynamic memory structures serve as interpretants both in the case of perception and of action. Whereas the semiotic components of perceptions, actions and cultural processes are directly accessible, this is not so with the parts of the internal processes. The latter can only indirectly become manifest, i.e. by further semioses which are of course action processes and their results.

The present conception will be briefly illustrated with research from a field called People with their Things in their Rooms and which includes the psychology of things, of residential activities and of urban settings. The conception appears pertinent to several branches of psychology, among them general, developmental, social, environmental, and cultural psychology. In addition it appears to obviate the

venerable mind-body-problem, because all structures formed by semiosis are neither simply material nor simply mental.

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## 9. Younger humans 1993: 1 / 1

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### 9.1. Date: Sat, 27 Feb 1993 11:43:15 +0100

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From: "Alfred Lang, U.Bern" <lang@psy.unibe.ch>  
Subject: Re: Younger humans  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Jay Lemke writes in response to the "Orwellian strands in Pedagogy":

"This myth of the inadequacy of children is so strikingly like former (and sometimes still current myths) of the inadequacy of females, of blacks, of slaves, of serfs, of workers, of non-Western people, both in form and in function, that you would think SOMEBODY would notice."

I might like to add to this list university students.

The extent to which we older fellows believe that we have to make programs for forming the elite of the future society, is strange and often deadly indeed. Its a wonder so many survive. For, we make the rules, we define the contents, the procedures, and finally we make the exams. What a strange way to hinder the dialogue between generations that is so essential for a living society. What a bad old way to keep canonized science in its stony perpetuation.

Alfred

E-mail on Internet: lang@psy.unibe.ch

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## 10. Scientific concepts 1992: 1 / 6

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### 10.1. Date: Wed, 12 May 93 09:48:00 EDT

From: Martin.Packer@um.cc.umich.edu  
Subject: LPP - endpoint of learening  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

I promised to share some more details of the course Jean Lave and I taught, titled "Everyday life and learning." Here's a brief description of the axiological framework we set up at the start of the course.

Any theory of learning or development involves a judgment, an evaluation, even a political stand, for it requires specification of a criterion by means of which one distinguishes it from mere change. (Bruner has made this point about learning: a model of the learner involves "a value judgment about how the mind should be cultivated and to what end"; "a decision about an ideal, about how we [conceive] what a learner \*should\* be in order to assure that a society of a particularly valued kind could be safeguarded"; Werner and Kaplan have made much the same point about models of development). Jean and I felt that we should start with a descriptive examination, a cataloging, of a range of learning theories in order to see what they valued and whether any patterns were discernible. The general pattern was that a bunch of theories took as their standard, their endpoint, a state Jean and I came quickly to call "the refined." "Refined" theories of learning and development vaunted movement towards an endpoint that is: (1) abstract (freed from impurities, purified, clarified), (2) formal (precise, exact), and (3) cultivated or elite (the province of experts, authorities, scientists, village elders, etc.). Piaget's formal operational intelligence would be one example of this.

I used a cube of sugar to make the point in class. This white cube is refined sugar: it is freed from impurities by a process of distillation, extraction or abstraction, so that a single kind of chemical molecule is present; it is purified, white, shaped in perfect crystalline platonic forms, both at the micro level (its grains) and the macro level (the cubes). And sugar used to be included in the dowries of European monarchy (in the form, however, of crystals rather than pressed cubes, so here quotidian analogy broke down). This "refined" sugar is abstract, formal, and elite.

A good many theories of learning fell into this first general category. Some, however, fell into a different category, one which we could not resist impishly naming the "Crude" theories of learning (this may have occurred to Jean while she was refueling her sports car - I can't recall.). These inverted the axiology: what was valued was movement towards an endpoint that is concrete instead of abstract,

informal instead of formal, and common rather than elite. Much of the course was directed towards articulating a third axiology we called "Everyday," but I'll save that for another message.

So tell me, where do various versions of activity theory and cultural developmental theory fit in this set of analytical categories?

Martin Packer

## **10.2. Date: Thu, 13 May 1993 21:40:52 UTC+0100**

From: james wertsch <wertsch@cica.es>  
Subject: teloi of learning\development  
To: xlchc@ucsd.bitnet

I think Martin Packer is right on target in emphasizing that any theory of learning or development has at least an implicit value system built into it. In the case of Vygotsky, I have become increasingly interested in what I see as a kind of split personality on this issue. On the one hand, he definitely had an ideal of Enlightenment rationality in mind when he talked about scientific concepts, etc. On the other hand, his analysis of inner speech suggests he still had room for some other kind of telos (a term that rubs off on one if one spends enough time at Clark) in mind. Specifically, it seems to me that he had a kind of Renaissance humanism in mind when discussing many issues such as inner speech. This formulation has come home to me quite forcefully now that I have finally had a chance to read Stephen Toulmin's volume COSMOPOLIS, where he outlines a way to relate Modernity, with its ideals of Enlightenment rationality and Renaissance humanism.

In short, I think that Martin is right to point out that virtually any theory of learning or development has an evaluative stance built into it. This is something that we should recognize and deal with much more openly in our theorizing. There is no way to escape the political implications of any such account.

## **10.3. Date: Sat, 29 May 1993 19:01:17 -0700**

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
Subject: which way is up?  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu Cc: shulman@sumex-aim.stanford.edu

Dear Colleagues-

What follows is a somewhat slapdash attempt to summarize the main lines of discussion that have grown up from Edouard Legache's efforts to get us to think about the Lave-Wenger ideas of legitimate peripheral practice/communities of practice vis a vis issues of schooling and conceptual change. I am missing some of the relevant notes which I include only from memory. My desire is not to create an

authoritative account, but a tool for continued exploration. I pick up with Lagache's reactions to the snippet from Yrjo Engestrom in which Yrjo is discussing the promise of different conceptual frameworks for overcoming the encapsulation of knowledge acquired in school.

LEGACHE made two major points:

1. The LPP perspective questions assumption that schools are priveleged sites of learning.
2. Learning is (most) usefully understood as changes in the social/participant structure of activity and not as change in individuals.

MOLL, in context of current South African situation, worries about the negative consequences of not attending school because a special kind of knowledge/ability is acquired there- the ability to think in terms of true/scientific concepts (Vygotsky (hereafter LSV) or formal operations (a la Piaget).

WERTSCH likes MOLL's characterization of the scientific/spontaneous concept distinction in LSV, but queries the issue of motivation for acquisition of the two kinds. WERTSCH contrasts Chapter 6 of *\*Thought and Language\** (reborn *\*Thinking and Speech\**) with Chapter 7. Chapter 6 valorizes rationalism, Chapter 7 is more "renaissance/ humanist" (after Toulmin in *\*Cosmopolis\**).

WELLS cautions against treating the scientific/spontaneous (often called everyday) distinction as an "in the world dichotomy) either as kinds of concepts of kinds of settings where concepts are aquired. He worries about encapsulation of school knowledge which renders it inert. His solution?

"To my mind, classrooms should be places where teachers select activities that a) have goals that are intrinsically motivating for students, b) allow them to bring their knowledge (everyday and scientific) to bear on the problems that arise, c) provide occasions for appropriating the cultural artifacts of intellectual practices and conceptual structures that are considered of central curricular importance, and d) encourage dialogue among students and between students and teacher about the relationship between their `everyday' ways of acting and thinking and those that have been arrived at by the systematic inquiry of previous generations."

SERPELL asks a lot of good questions about the SAfrica situation vis a vis the reconstitution of schooling for the Black population that will have to be addressed by those close enough to the situation to provide answers/continued discussion.

DEBELLO agrees with WELLS and MOLL and WERTSCH (and others) that the LSV true/scientific/academic vs spontaneous/everyday distinction is worthwhile, and with WELLS that it not be identified with a school/everyday life distinction. DEBELLO argues that LSV says that true concepts arise from dialectical interaction of

scientific and spontaneous concepts (which is presumably the silver cross against encapsulation-mc). She reports from her work in adult work settings where a new scientific conceptual system is imposed on old work practices that the spontaneous concepts from work practices are in fact reorganized as LSV suggested they would be--IF IF IF the dialectic is properly organized. She asks if others have data from simulation studies of the sort the CUNY group have been conducting.

ISHIBASHI introduces a different kind of distinction: learning skills versus learning with understanding. She queries DEBELLO about the kind of change she sees. DEBELLO responds that she sees reorganization of understanding.

DYKSTRA reports that he is a constructionist, not a Vygotskian. He points out that lots of current work indicates that scientists and other academic types do not think in formal closed systems. As I interpret him, he supports WELLS in arguing against a strong science/ everyday distinction.

DEBELLO responds by pointing out that LSV did not mean "science per se" when referring to scientific concepts, but to formalized (closed) systems of concepts/knowledge such as math and chess. She makes the additional, in my opinion critical, point (contra WERTSCH??) that LSV did not privilege scientific concepts as better than spontaneous ones, writing that scientific concepts have no meaning and cannot be used creatively without spontaneous concepts.

LEMKE questions the entire notion of DECON textualized knowledge. in school or anywhere else. He also questions (a la LPP) the special status of schools. He writes:

" I have spent a lot of time in a lot of schools in many places, and seen a fairly narrow range of human activity going on in them, certainly far too narrow to conceivably claim that they offer any specially useful preparation for the incredible diversity of activities and situation types in the social systems that includes schools."

He and BAZERMAN both point out that the radically different contexts created by distance education have some interesting potentials for non-transmission education. These points are well taken and deserve separate treatment.

Whew. A lot of ideas and I skipped over a lot!

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I have lots of questions. Here are some.

1. What is the importance of the structure of conceptual content in contending discussions about learning/development/schooling? For some it seems critical (LSV/Davydov). What about LPP? Learning by expanding?

2. If DEBELLO is correct, the LSV approach can be seen as an interesting way to combine differences in the structure of content with the principle that development comes from dialectical interaction of top-down and bottom-up constraints/sources of knowledge. Yes? No?

3. Earlier I wondered about the way in which preference for developmental over alternative (PACKER's "third choice" WERTSCH's (or Toulmin's) renaissance humanism) valuative systems interacted with whether one is concerned with children or adults. DEBELLO provides a neat way to think about adults in terms of conceptual change that could be called development while avoiding (?) a differential valuation of spontaneous vs. scientific conceptual organization. So far no one has preferred a program of work with children that avoids the idea of development and some (implicit) values concerning what is worthwhile. Do we need Rousseau here?

Note: Chapter 6 of Thinking and Speech is about kids in school. Chapter 7 is about adults in life.

4. I am perplexed by Dewey Dykstra's contrast between constructivism and "the LSV approach." My understanding of the latter, which I refer to as a cultural-historical approach, is that it is a form of cultural constructivism that Wozniak, Valsiner, and others refer to as "coconstructionism." What interpretation of LSV leaves out the constructivist aspect?

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I am not certain if this kind of recap is useful. Time, and the messages to follow, ought to clarify that question.

Monday is memorial day in the United States. It is a day to re-member the many millions of people who have died in wars in this century. As I write these lines I am trapped in the anxiety that two young colleagues in what is called the Former Soviet Union may have been harmed as they attempted to provide e-mail access to ethnic enclaves beset by deadly violence. My headlines tell me of bombings in Italy, shelling in Bosnia, killings in South Africa and elsewhere, not to speak of the daily violence in my own country. There is a lot to member, as well as re-member.

Mike

Michael Cole

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#### **10.4. Date: Fri, 4 Jun 1993 23:18:22 -0700**

From: yengestr@weber.ucsd.edu (Yrjo Engestrom)  
Subject: Davydov and concepts  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Let me very briefly point out that there is a marked difference in Vygotsky's and Davydov's understanding of concepts. The distinction between 'spontaneous' or 'everyday' concepts and 'scientific' concepts proposed by Vygotsky is not accepted by Davydov. Davydov presented a sympathetic but strong critique of this notion in his 'Types of Generalization in Instruction' which appeared in Russian in 1972 (and which appeared in English in 1990, though nobody seems to be able to locate a copy of this pathbreaking classic).

For Davydov, the key is in classical German dialectic philosophy, especially in Hegel's critique of abstract thinking (Hegel has a wonderful little text titled "Who thinks abstractly", if I recall correctly; I recommend). For this line of thought, abstract thinking is dead thinking, detached from living systemic wholes. Abstraction (more specifically, empirical abstraction) means dissecting the whole, separating some of its features or elements, taking them apart and ordering, naming and classifying them on the basis of some arbitrary properties. Such abstraction eliminates the possibility of conceptualizing development and change; abstract concepts become frozen, immobile, non-developmental.

In this light, it is erroneous to assume that Davydov aims at decontextualization (Lemke). The idea of ascending from the abstract to the concrete implies that the 'goal' is recontextualization, conceptual reconstruction of the systemic whole. In this view, the concrete is the whole, the living system in its inner relations. When we approach a sensually given whole, we cannot avoid conceptualizing it - our sensory experience is deeply theory-laden (i.e., cultural). The question is, does this conceptualization take the path of empirical abstraction or the much more demanding path of the 'genetic method', i.e., ascending from the abstract to the concrete. The latter leads to theoretical concepts. This is not at all the same as 'scientific concepts'. A carpenter's tacit notions may be much more theoretical than a scholar's literary tirades. Textbooks very typically are filled with empirical abstractions which are misleadingly called 'theory'.

Moreover, the distinction between empirical and theoretical concepts in Davydov is analytically important but does not imply a dichotomy. In all our practice and thought, static contemplative observation (mental consumption, if you will) and dynamic interventionist experimentation (mental production, if you will) are intertwined and inseparable. The dynamic oscillation between these in practical situations was beautifully observed by Karmiloff-Smith and Inhelder in their classic paper "If you want to get ahead, get a theory" (1975), but it's been very vividly

observed and described earlier by gestalt psychologists, by Otto Selz, by Frederic Bartlett, and by John Dewey.

According to Vygotsky, there were roughly speaking three characteristics which make scientific concepts distinctive. First, they are always included in a conceptual system or hierarchy. Secondly, they require that the learner is conscious of them, they are explicit. Thirdly, they are not acquired spontaneously but through instruction.

Now Davydov points out the inadequacy of these criteria to capture the nature of theoretical concepts. First, even empirical concepts commonly are parts of a hierarchy, often even very elaborate classificatory system of 'genus-species' type. Look at any organization chart and you see a totally formal empirical abstraction with no dynamic interconnections, no inner movement. Or look at the endless lists and classifications taught at schools.

Secondly, as implied above, empirical concepts are very commonly consciously acquired and taught in schools. In fact, according to Davydov, they are the dominant contents of school instruction.

There is much much more to this story. It's a story of a different logic and different epistemology.

Yrjo Engestrom

LCHC at UCSD

## **10.5. Date: Mon, 07 Jun 1993 18:55:54 MET**

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From: Alfred Lang (Univ. Bern) <LANG@PSY.unibe.ch>  
Subject: FWD: scientific concepts  
To: xlchc@PSY.unibe.ch

It's an extended and multifaceted field, the evocation of Vygotsky's distinction between scientific and non-scientific concepts has raised. I want to concentrate on one facet. Many scientists claim that scientific concepts are such that retain their meaning independent of context. Perhaps objectives of formal schooling emphasize such conceptual invariance. Is the hope of formal education to imbue the educated with such invariant instruments?

Taken by that standard, Vygotsky's distinction certainly does not stand for a scientific concept, witness the interpretative attempts on this network. And that standard is a very high one indeed, since not so many so-claimed scientific concepts stand up to it, among them probably very few from fields psychological. So perhaps, by the very criteria for scientific concepts, a specific subset of such



concepts is distinguished with the side effect, that an implied conception is that of a mechanistic science.

So, my contention would be to forget about this facet of the distinction, because it would exactly be opposed to claims that (even formal) education is contributing to open development. At least I hope, education does not aim at making machines.

Alfred Lang, U. of Bern, lang(at)psy.unibe.ch

[next AL message](#)

## 10.6. Date: Tue, 8 Jun 93 01:15:54 -0700

From: ematusov@cats.UCSC.EDU  
Subject: Davydov  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Hello, everybody--

I am sorry to jump into the discussion about scientific and everyday thinking, Vygotsky and Davydov although I have not yet gotten full membership in the network, so I have not been able to read network messages without a help of my friend who is a full member.

Anyway, first of all I would like to thank Yrjo Engestrom for his very precise outline of Davydov's theory (at least in my recollection). It is important to stress that Davydov is not Vygotskian but neo-Vygotskian (like many participants of this network). As Yrjo correctly points out, Davydov criticizes Vygotsky for a lack of dialectics in his analysis of child thinking development. Vygotsky argued for scientific thinking based on the guise form of generalization (see Vygotsky and Saharov's experiments on generating concepts); while Davydov argues for "theoretical" thinking based on the genetic form of generalization (see below). Another striking difference between Davydov and Vygotsky is that Davydov as a student of Leont'ev works in the frame of a theory of activity that is quite different than Vygotsky's sociohistorical approach (see very good book by van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991 for details). Vygotsky's unit of analysis was "word," while for Davydov (like for Leont'ev) it is social activity.

Now let me outline a few additional features of Davydov's theory (of course, in my recollection and interpretation) that might be relevant for the ongoing discussion.

### 1. Abstraction vs. concrete.

When scientists face with the variety of phenomena, which they prefer to call with a single name, a problem to define the variety or, saying differently, to create a generalization for the variety appears. In the history of sciences there are a few approaches of making generalization. First, it is the guise form of generalization.

That is a seeking invariants in the variety of phenomena. An example of this approach is the psychological theory of associations where associations are viewed to derive from guise similarity between experienced events. Second, it is the holistic form of generalization. According to this approach, the phenomena represent functional or/and structural parts of a whole. The best example of the holistic form of generalization is tracking of animal's organs as functional parts of a animal's body. Third, it is the genetic form of generalization. According to this approach, the phenomena represent evolutionary or developmental modifications of some initial phenomenon. A good example of the approach is Darwin's classification of species. Here I predominantly will focus on description of the genetic approach.

For example, despite unlikeness in appearance, a bat and a dolphin have much more genetic similarity than, to say, a dolphin and a shark looking alike. A bat and a dolphin have a close ancestor, creodont, starting the carnivorous mammal group. A creodont looked like a dog or a cat. There is very little similarity in bat's, dolphin's and creodont's guises. But for understanding of modifications and development of, to say, dolphins it is better to compare them with bats and creodonts than with sharks. Creodont, in our example, is the concrete generality and undeveloped form of the carnivorous mammal group. It is the genetic definition of the carnivorous mammal group, like the first cell appearing on the Earth is the genetic definition of any life creature on the our planet. (Except biology, Hegel's genetic approach is used in linguistics for comparison languages, in history for checking kinship between different people, in economics (by Marx) for tracing subsequent forms of commodity.)

"Overcoming a descriptive phenotypic point of view in biology was related with Darwin's discovery. His discovery of the origin of species has enabled to make the absolutely new type of scientific classification, which Lewin calls conditionally genetic classification in opposition to phenotypic classification based on guise. Phenomenon is defined not with its guise but on the basis of its genuine origin. The difference of these approaches can be seen with biological example. Thus, from guise point of view, whale is closer to fish than to mammals, but from biological nature point of view, it is closer to cow or deer than to pike or shark." (Vygotsky, 1983, p.97)

According to Hegel, the genetic approach is accompanied with the logical reconstruction of the genetically initial phenomenon. It is a necessary step in order to trace the development of the initial phenomenon. There are three issues related to the reconstruction. What develops, through which stages does the development go, and what is a source of the development?

The reconstruction is based on several assumptions. First, a phenomenon should be understood as a system consisting of parts linked with an internal relation. Second, the parts of the system should be seen as polar and, hence, the internal relation between polar parts is a form of contradiction. Contradiction is a subject of

development: it develops from its immediate through mediated to united form. Third, the contradicting relation is also a source of development. Contradiction is both a subject and a source of development. The immediate form of the contradicting relation is so-called "the initial abstraction" that, at the same time, realized in a form of the concrete initial phenomenon (Hegel, 1975).

A Soviet psychologist and overt Hegel's follower Davydov has characterized the abstraction generalized by the genetically initial phenomenon as:

... it is historically simple, contradicting and essential relation of the phenomenon. (Davydov, 1986, p.120)

According to Davydov, the content of this abstraction corresponds to a historically initial, simple, concrete, immediate relation of the whole system. Although the initial abstraction includes only simple, immature, immediate relation, it has to be able to represent all of the phenomena after the following mediation and differentiation processes. The abstraction reflects all of the contractions of the simple, immediate relation of the system. Further, the simple, immediate relation becomes a source for following development of the phenomenon - its mediation and differentiation. The content of the initial abstraction reflects not only simple and immediate but also essential relation of the studied system (Davydov, 1986, pp.118-121). Following Hegel, Davydov stresses that the initial abstraction appears in form of a real, concrete phenomenon.

2. Scientific vs. theoretical types of thinking. According to Davydov, only so called (by him) "theoretical" thinking is responsible for the genetic form of generalization that grasps the reality most truly than any other type of generalization. The opposition to "theoretical" thinking is so called (again by Davydov) "empirical" thinking that mainly based on the guise form of generalization. Moreover, "theoretical" thinking includes "empirical" thinking as its moment. Darwin's genetic classification of species was preceded by Lamarck's guise classification. Darwin did not dismissed Lamarck's classification, he discovered initial genetic relationship in it and reconstructed according to that relationship.

Thus, scientific thinking might be or might be not "theoretical" (Davydov criticizes science as modern as traditional for being married with "empirical" thinking). As well as "theoretical" thinking might be non-scientific, non-schooled, practical and so forth (Davydov's examples are some musicians, art craftsmen, artists, ancient philosophers, theologians, and so on). While Vygotsky emphasized universalism of schooled, scientific thinking; Davydov stresses universalism of "theoretical" thinking. For this and some other statements Davydov might be regarded as a rather interesting type of anti-contextualist (in mainstream sense of this term).

3. Text vs. activity.

This is one of the main differences between Vygotsky and Davydov. I like the term "recontextualization" used by Yrjo Engestrom to stress difference between Vygotsky who used something close to the idea of "decontextualization" (coined by Wertsch if I am not wrong) and Davydov. But I doubt that Davydov would like it. The reason is that, according to Davydov (again in my interpretation), education does not re- or de- "contextualize" experience of previous generations but rather it "re-activates" it. What the previous generations have accumulated is a variety of activity forms that also involves different types of mediators (like sociocultural tools, symbols, texts, artifacts and so on) as well as social arrangements. Under guidance of representatives of an older generation (teachers) children should be involved in those activities through their re- activation.

How to do that? According to Davydov it should be done through the genetic analysis of the concrete initial relation that generates all variety of the given activity. Let's take arithmetic, the concept of number. A traditional approach would give a child a few pictures represented a guise of number three: three apples in a circle; three chickens; three trees and so on. This is empirical approach of the guise form of generalization. According to the genetic analysis, any number represents a relationship between a set and a unit. So, to understand, to re- activate the number relationship, it is necessary to constantly re- build and re-define a unit of counting despite the guise of the set (e.g., Davydov's example, "I see three of something in this set (of six candies). What "something" do I count?" -- the correct answer is "a peer of candies"; then Davydov alternates the number, and hence the unit of counting, until the latter becomes a box of candies (a set of 12 for number=1/2); and so on).

I think it is interesting to discuss "anti-contextualism" of Davydov (in some sense it is close to Lave's (1992) argument that there is very little real math in everyday life). Davydov thinks that school (the ideal school) should create its own context for the child that, unlike everyday life, exploits theoretical thinking.

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# 11. Kant 1993: 9/ 41

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## 11.1. Date: Sun, 18 Jul 1993 15:23:22 +1000

From: ewatson@lingua.cltr.uq.oz.au (Ellen Watson)  
Subject: Empirical/Theoretical again  
To: xlhc@ucsd.edu

I got behind in reading xlhc messages, and so this request concerns a message that was sent some time ago. Eugene Matusov's message concerning the Hegelian origins of the terms 'empirical' and 'theoretical' in Davydov's work was very helpful. Perhaps it would be clearer in English to change 'empirical' to 'Empiricist'. I would like to ask Eugene for more elaboration on one of his final comments. He emphasizes Hegel's distinction between 'mind' and 'intellect.' Since in the Empiricist tradition (which most of us grew up in (?) -- or at least I did) experience and abstraction from it -- empirical reasoning, for Davydov & Hegel -- is supposed to supply all the content in, and in fact constitute, the mind, there is no 'mind/intellect' distinction to be made. It would therefore be helpful to have a summary of what these two terms mean, in the works of Hegel, Davydov, and Matusov!

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## 11.2. Date: Thu, 22 Jul 93 12:41:03 -0700

From: ematusov@cats.ucsc.edu  
Subject: intellect vs. mind  
To: xlhc@ucsd.edu

Let me briefly answer on Ellen Watson's question (07/19/93) about difference between intellect and mind, how it was defined in German philosophy. First of all, I want to do a few warnings. I am not a philosopher, I read philosophical books long time ago, I read them in Russian (I do not know the quality of the translation from German into Russian), and do not have those books on hands. So, be careful about my writing, because it is more caricature than precise description of philosophical discussion.

As I remember, discussion of opposition between the concepts of intellect and mind was started by Kant and fully developed by Hegel. I read about this issue in Kant's book titled (in Russian) "Critique of pure mind" (*Kritika chistogo razuma*). I found that there are at least two translations of this book in English "Critick of pure reason; translated from the original of Immanuel Kant. London, W. Pickering, 1838" and "Critique of judgment. Translated, with an introduction, by J. H. Bernard." (I suspect that Russian translation of the title is better, but because I do not know German it is a pure guess.) As to Hegel, I read his books, of course, also in Russian. I recommend one of them for the discussion (translation in English "The encyclopedia logic, with the *Zusatze* : Part I of the Encyclopedia of philosophical sciences with the *Zusatze* / G. W. F. Hegel ; a new translation with introduction and notes by T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting,...").

According to Kant, in order for experience to become thinkable it should be transformed into categories. Those categories themselves, as Kant showed, can't be derived from experience and exist before any experience a priori. (By the way, for me as a psychologist, it is a very interesting point. I think Kant is right that categorical thinking origins not in manipulation with physical environment but transcends it. I would argue that categorical thinking origins in social interaction and cultural guidance.) The function of intellect is to make generalization of the experience through classification -- correspondence of the experience to the categories, while the consecutive job of mind is farther generalization, but already, of the categories in a logically non-contradicted way. However, as Kant correctly pointed out categories exist in pairs of antinomy. Each category has its own and opposite twin: "cause" has "effect," "necessity" has "freedom," "stability" has "change," and so on. The problem is that any given experience can be attached by intellect to any of two antinomy category without causing logical contradiction in future generalization. Indeed, for example, any given event can be described as cause or as effect without much trouble.

There is no trouble for intellect to choose one of two (it can't choose both categories because they are logical antinomy), but there is trouble for mind because function of mind to synthesize different kinds of experience expressed in the categorical form. According to Kant, mind must rid off intellect's arbitrariness of choosing one of two antinomy categories and include both of them since both of them equally well describe the experience. Otherwise, arbitrariness of choosing antinomy categories leads to diversity of thinking that does not have common ground. But including antinomy categories would destroy the logic, the mind's guide of categorical generalization. That is why Kant saw inability of pure mind to sustain its function of categorical generalization. It happens because intellect, given as it is, is immanently contradicting and because application of the antinomy categories is not limited by anything in the realm of experience.

Of course, it is possible to rid off a half of categories from thinking to save mind, announcing that one of the antimony categories is legitimate and correct, while the other one is wrong. For example it is possible to declare the category "fortuity" as a

subjective category, characterizing our ignorance of causes of events but it leads to fatalism and rigid necessity. Kant rejected this approach as arbitrary. Kant's conclusion is that pure mind (i.e., categorical generalization) is impossible; thinking has to be limited by intellect's job of arbitrary classifications of experience.

Hegel rejected Kant's tacit assumption that thinking is only reflection of experience. Hegel argued that thinking defines itself not only in the reflecting activity but in any activity, not only in reflecting the experience but in organizing the experience as well. Thinking is process of changing environment not just reflecting of it. Thus, thinking is not limited by only categorical thinking but can be appear in any people's deeds and activities. As to categorical thinking, it does not only generalize the experience but also specifies it. Experience, itself, is no more just a thing but also a process.

For Hegel, the function of thinking is not only generalization but also specification. In order to understand the specific form of a thing, it is not enough to place this form in a class of similarly looking forms (like what pure intellect does) but to define the process of how this given form was developed. All mediated forms of this process generate genetic classification. Here similarity for the classification is viewed as closeness and belongingness in the developmental process rather than the guise.

Hegel pointed out that intellect limited by itself can produce only ARBITRARY guise classification of motionless forms. But when it becomes "a moment" of mind, it serves for description of mediated specific developmental forms that immediately are "overcome" by synthetic power of the mind focusing of the process of development. Hegel argued that when thinking limits itself by only activity of intellect, it freezes motion of things and it becomes empty and arbitrary.

Eugene Matusov

University of California at Santa Cruz.

### **11.3. Date: Thu, 22 Jul 1993 13:23:22 -0700**

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
Subject: exceedingly helpful  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Eugene- That was, for me at least, an exceedingly helpful message on intellect/mind. Thanks.

mike cole

### **11.4. Date: Mon, 26 Jul 1993 11:54:48 +1000**

From: ewatson@lingua.cltr.uq.oz.au (Ellen Watson)

Subject: Kant  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

I also extend thanks to Eugene for his helpful summary. Kant and Hegel are notoriously difficult to read (in any language!), so it was helpful to have a summary of points that are relevant to recent discussions on xlchc.

Just one bibliographic note, for the information of Eugene and anyone else who is interested. Kant wrote three Critiques, all huge and ponderous, all on slightly different topics. The Critique of Pure Reason is the one most philosophers read; it is the most theoretical, and was written in direct response to Empiricism, particularly that of David Hume. The Critique of Practical Reason concerns moral and political reasoning, and The Critique of Judgement concerns aesthetics, and is the one that has been taken up by philosophers of art, etc. For smaller and more easily digestible versions of Kant's theories, try the Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics (summary of his first Critique), and Metaphysics of Morals (summary of the second).

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### **11.5. Date: Mon, 26 Jul 93 13:49:49 -0700**

From: ematusov@cats.ucsc.edu  
Subject: Re: Kant  
To: ewatson@lingua.cltr.uq.oz.au, xlchc@ucsd.edu

Thank Ellen Watson very much for correction of my mistake. I am sorry! I erroneously included The Critique of Judgement as an English version of translation of the first of three Kant's Critique. The reason for the mistake is that in Russian all three titles were translated differently than in English. I want to ask a German-speaking colleague who is familiar with Kant's writing how the titles of three Kant's Critiques sound in German (in literal translation in English).

Eugene Matusov  
University of California at Santa Cruz

### **11.6. Date: Tue, 27 Jul 1993 09:00:39 MET**

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From: Alfred Lang (Univ. Bern) <LANG@PSY.unibe.ch>



Subject: Re: Kant  
To: xlchc-request@PSY.unibe.ch

Here are the original titles of Kant's three "Kritiken" and a literal translation of them:

Kritik der reinen Vernunft -- critique of pure reason -- 1781, rev. 1787

Kritik der praktischen Vernunft -- critique of practical reason -- 1788

Kritik der Urteilskraft -- critique of the power to judge -- 1790, 1793, 1799.

Pure reason refers to epistemology, practical reason to ethics, the power or faculty to judge or to evaluate to esthetics.

There is a very convenient and inexpensive edition available from the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, P.O. Box 11 15 53, D-6100 Darmstadt 11, Germany. 10 Pb. volumes in box for DM 112.-

Have fun in reading him, don't trust most of the secondary literature while studying some of it and don't miss Charles Peirce's critique of the critiques!

Alfred Lang

[next AL message](#)

## 11.7. Date: 07/29/93

From: AGATTI@BRUSP.ANSP.BR  
Subject: experience and generalization  
To: "<xlchc@ucsd.BitNet>" <xlchc@ucsd.BitNet>

I would like to comment the following excerpt from a message sent to xlchc by Ellen Watson (it is not a literal transcription):

(Eugene Matusov(?)) emphasizes Hegel's distinction between 'mind' and 'intellect.' Since in the Empiricist tradition experience and abstraction from it -- empirical reasoning, for Davydov & Hegel -- is supposed to supply all the content in, and in fact constitute, the mind, there is no 'mind/intellect' distinction to be made.

What attracted my attention is the following idea:

"Experience and abstraction from it is supposed to supply all the content in, and in fact constitute the mind".

Mind without experience is like a computer without DOS.

Without experience, the world would be a complete disorder. Any event would be unforeseeable. Experience supplies us with mental predispositions regarding

precedencies, concomitancies and sequencies of stimuli, of events, etc Experience puts order in the perceived world. Laws are summaries of connections between stimuli and/or events. Logical laws are higher order summaries of laws. Mind is this whole constituted by stimuli, laws and logical laws. The child's mental potentialities, pure disorder or chaos, now have a DOS.

This is one side of the problem, the one regarding experience. Now, I'll show another side of it. It is related to the mentioned generalization and it seems to contradict what I have just said.

It is a fact (or, is it a fact?) that we live experiences which could be labeled as experiences of similitudes, likenesses, resemblances, etc.. We say, for instance, that this is a pencil and that that is also a pencil. Resemblance is considered basic regarding such so called rational processes as concept formation and classification. If there were no resemblances, it is said, we would be imersed in a complete confusion. Now, the big question is: How can we account for that "undeniable" feeling of similitude? Theoretically speaking it cannot be accounted for. In fact, when two things are compared they can be said to be either identical, similar or different. But, if they are identical, according to the identitas indiscernibilium principle, they could not be distinguished. (The identitas indiscernibilium principle means that if two or more things are identical they could not be distinguished one from the other. Thus, they would not be two things but only one ). (From these last considerations one can conclude that the phrase: "two or more identical things" has no meaning. It is like the phrase: a round square ). Going on with our "demonstration" I would say that if two or more things are said to be similar that would mean that they are identical in some aspects and different in others. We could "similarly" analyse the concept of different, i.e, the different is identical in some aspects and different in others.( As one can see the word different leads to "similar" problems ). So we should say that when things are said to be similar that means that they are identical in some aspects and unique in other ones. But the identical parts would be only one thing. They could not be distinguished. They would be undiscernable. Thus, the conclusion is that when two things are said to be compared they are not compared at all since they are unique. They cannot be said to be either identical or similar. ( One could say the same(?) regarding perception. To perceive is to perceive the unique, the singular ). But if everything is unique where does the "resemblance experience" come from? Do we really have such an experience? Or could we say that two things are said to be identical or similar when their differences ( or rather, their singularity ) do not matter? But can we deny the similarity of, for instance, forms like O and O, A and A, etc? How can we explain the mentioned cognitive processes of concept formation, classification and categorization? I simply to not know.

In other words, do we really form concepts, classify or categorize? Or, better put, what is it that really happens when we do the things identified by the above mentioned words: concept, classification and categorization? Does resemblance really exist? What does rational mean if classification and/or categorization are

accused of not being or of only being flatus vocis? rational beings? What does "rational" mean if cognitive operations such as classification, concept formation, etc are being suspected of non-existence? Are we not rather perceiver beings than rational beings? But how can we account for the "undeniable" feeling of learning from past experience? How could we learn from past if we deny the existence of those cognitive operations, if everything or event is unique? I do not know.

### **11.8. Date: Fri, 30 Jul 1993 16:57:32 +1000**

From: ewatson@lingua.cltr.uq.oz.au (Ellen Watson)  
Subject: Concepts and Abstraction  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

This is an open response to Antonio Agatti, which is much belated -- sorry about that, Antonio!

Don't feel bad -- NOBODY knows how we can explain the cognitive processes of concept formation, classification and categorization. In a way, philosophers have been working on this since about 600 BC. The earliest, Presocratic, philosophers were worried about the essences of things and what objects had in common. Plato's Forms, which arrived on the scene about 250 years later, were designed to answer these questions. The Empiricists were fundamentally interested in developing a theory of properties. Schools of philosophy have been shunting the responsibility for similarities and resemblances and types and natural kinds from the external world to the mind of the beholder and back again, for centuries. The last time I did any work in this area was about eight years ago, in the context of a seminar on John Locke, and I read around in the recent psychological literature on concept formation and categorization and abstraction. It was a mess, and had no more satisfying solutions than Locke did, or than Plato had. I haven't read much since then -- Connectionism is purported to provide some more satisfactory models -- but I think everyone would agree that there is much work to be done.

I must say, though, (and I'm not just saying this to please all the people on this net), the best story I've ever come across about concept formation and concept acquisition is in Vygotsky's *Thought and Language*, Chapter 5. It seemed to encompass all the competing theories I'd run across, and place them together in a spiralling developmental process, which these post-Hegelian theories are wont to do.

If you're interested in further reading, I'd recommend that chapter; the work of Eleanor Rosch; a book by Smith and Medin called something like "Quality and Concept", published in 1981; and discussions of the Empiricists (Hobbes, Locke, Hume, etc.), because their failures are interesting failures.

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### 11.9. Date: Fri, 30 Jul 1993 09:59:13 -0700

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
 Subject: Lakoff  
 To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Antonio and Ellen--

I finally got around to reading George Lakoff's **\*\*Women, fire, and dangerous things\*** which has lots of interesting things to say about categorization that I think very compatible with cultural- historical thinking within the framework set up by Eugene's message (which, aside from being grateful for, I have not had time to follow up on).

Anyway, Lakoff summarizes the Rosch work and adds a LOT

mike

### 11.10. Date: 31 Jul 93 15:04:29 AST

From: "Russ Hunt" <HUNT@academic.stu.StThomasU.ca>  
 Subject: Re: Lakoff (and Edelman)  
 To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

I am reminded by Mike's note about Lakoff's book that I've meant to ask for some time if anyone else has read Edelman's *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire*, which seems to me to offer some hard, biological evidence to support Lakoff's models of categorization (and those compatible with cultural-historical thinking). It's hard going for me; I'm on my second run through the book, but it seems at least as powerful as Lakoff's in terms of offering me some new metaphors to think with (if nothing else).

-- Russ

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 |~
Russell A. Hunt _|~_)_ _)|~_ Learning and Teaching
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**11.11. Date: Sat, 31 Jul 1993 16:13:31 -0400 (EDT)**

From: Jozsef A Toth <jtoth+@pitt.edu>  
Subject: Re: Lakoff (and Edelman)  
To: "Russ Hunt" <HUNT@academic.stu.StThomasU.ca> Cc: xlchc@ucsd.edu

I'm about .5 through the Edelman book and am largely in agreement with what I have so far read. One would think that the AI and Cog. Sci. community would care about brain function and how it bears on theories of intelligence, but to the contrary, brain function research appears to be disputing certain functionalist assumptions (i.e., AI/Cog Sci) about brain function. The most important one being: brain function is not important in understanding the mind. That always seemed kind of hollow to me. Keeping in mind that functionalist assumptions in turn, seek system-wide mechanisms, such as propositions and production rules, in order to model/explain phenomena; the goal appears, in the end, to be the same.

As Bickhard argues as well, unless symbol-grounding and frame problems can be resolved in the functionalist terms that they were originally brought about, such functionalist theories will always carry a certain "hollowness" to them.

joe

**11.12. Date: Sat, 31 Jul 93 16:10 PDT**

From: Joe Plummer <IHW1029@MVS.OAC.UCLA.EDU>  
Subject: RE: Lakoff (and Edelman)  
To: xlchc@WEBER.UCSD.EDU Cc: IHW1JHS@MVS.OAC.UCLA.EDU

Russ Hunt's asking if anyone has read Edelman's most recent work has led me to finally weigh in and address the group.

Indeed, a great number of people here at UCLA are reading Edelman. The UCLA Neurobiology of Language Research Group (NLRG) is currently analyzing the complete works of Edelman in the hopes of developing an epistemology that can address the current crisis in brain/mind/language research. We hope to present this epistemology and some specific applications of the framework at an upcoming conference. My own work, for instance, applies aspects of Edelman's Theory of Neuronal Group Selection (TNGS)--the notions of *\*global mappings\** and *\*organs of succession\**--to Lakoff's theses on conceptual development via metaphorical process. The result is a neurobiological model which accounts for the context-dependency of metaphor at a number of analytical levels--physiological, anatomical, psychological, and social.

I find Edelman's work to confront a number of problems. It shows a way to avoid what L'eontiev called *\*naive reductionism\** and is highly conducive, I believe, to the principles of a cultural- historical epistemology. The TNGS is a non-eliminative reductionism; that is, while it is able to criticize theories of mind that do not rely

upon neurobiological realities, it does not insist that purely psychological explanations of mind are impossible. The TNGS does not purport to explain everything. It does, however, ask us to question whether we can any longer pursue "disembodied" notions of mind. Hilary Putnam's recent works can inform in this area.

But problems remain (as they always do). A number of critical areas remain underanalyzed: a multi-levelled approach to the concept of \*concept,\* specific cognitive (i.e., neurobiological) representations for discourse processes, etc. Also, parts of Edelman's works are subject to criticism due to some questionable neurobiological assumptions. Nevertheless, a number of folk here feel that the approach to mind advocated by Edelman, Lakoff, and others enables us to create models of cognition that are neurobiologically sound, yet broad enough to enhance our understanding of human diversity.

The work here is just beginning, but we believe this approach will be a very productive one.

Joe Plummer  
Dept. of Applied Linguistics  
UCLA  
ihw1029@mvs.oac.ucla.edu

### **11.13. Date: Sun, 01 Aug 1993 10:37:15 EST**

From: Joe Glick <jag@CUNYVMS1.BITNET>  
Subject: Kant/Cassirer  
To: xlchc@UCSD.BITNET Cc: jag@CUNYVMS1.BITNET

Am glad to see issues like Kant's critique (of whatever) in discussion. I would also recommend contact with Cassirer (Philosophy of Symbolic Forms - in three volumes). The first volume has a great introduction linking Cassirer's thought with Kant's - and linking all of that to matters of history and sociality.

Joe Glick

### **11.14. Date: Sun, 1 Aug 1993 09:37:58 -0700**

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
Subject: kant/hegel/edelman/lakoff  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

The comments about Edelman vis a vis Lakoff and cultural-historical ideas bring over threshold the following comment on Eugene Matusov's earlier summary of Kant/Hegel on categories.

Eugene wrote (in part): According to Kant, in order for experience to become thinkable it should be transformed into categories. Those categories themselves, as Kant showed, can't be derived from experience and exist before any experience a priori. (By the way, for me as a psychologist, it is a very interesting point. I think Kant is right that categorical thinking origins not in manipulation with physical environment but transcends it. I would argue that categorical thinking origins in social interaction and cultural guidance.)

At the time I read this made a mental note to comment that in my reading understanding of cultural-historical theorizing, one does not want to toss out the "a priori" of Kant interpreted as structuration arising in the phylogenetic history of the species/individual, but would want to place it in a complementary relationship with sociocultural-historical structuration. That is, we need something like BOTH modularity AND context, understood respectively as phylogenetic and cultural-historical sources of mental structure. Neither are sufficient-- also critical is the active appropriation of the environment the individual.

I have written some on this way of thinking in an article called "Context, modularity, and the cultural construction of development" in Vol. 2 of Winegar and Valsiner's book on development in social context published by Erlbaum. A little material linking these ideas to Edelman is in a forthcoming piece called "remembering the future" which we relates to the prolepsis discussion of a couple of xlchc years ago.

Thanks to Joe Glick for adding Cassirer to my summer reading list.

mike cole

## **11.15. Date: Mon, 02 Aug 1993 16:01:51 MET**

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From: Alfred Lang (Univ. Bern) <LANG@PSY.unibe.ch>  
Subject: re: Kant and Herder, rather than Hegel  
To: xlchc@PSY.unibe.ch

To those interested in the historical perspective of a possible cultural psychology:

I couldn't agree more with recent attempts on this platform to ascertain a possible position in the history of mind when we are trying to rebuild actual versions of a culture inclusiv psychology. However, as to the role of Kant, it should be made clear, that he counts -- with all admiration for his ingenuity in other respects -- perhaps foremost among those diverting cultural psychology from excellent tracks laid out in the 18th century by figures like Herder. It is important to reconstruct in detail the history of this second and mostly weak, but, I dare say, in the long run much more prolific stream of thought, going for 200 years alongside the mainstream. The latter separated the world into mind and matter with their





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Have fun! Alfred Lang

[next AL message](#)

### **11.17. Date: Tue, 3 Aug 1993 15:11:42 PDT**

From: Cynthia DuVal <duval@parc.xerox.com>  
Subject: Re: kant/hegel/edelman/lakoff  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu, mcole@weber.ucsd.edu

Mike,

I think that I am in agreement that we need modularity and context if we are to understand personality development, but what exactly do you mean by modularity? How are you viewing modularity and phylogeny? Are you thinking of organic universals? Can you send out an electronic copy of your "Context, modularity, and the cultural construction of development" chapter?

I do want to toss out the "a priori" of Kant (I felt this way after reading Metaphysic of Morals.) What is it that you want to keep? Even our "organically supported" potentials are influenced by our heritage; birth is not as clean a slate as Kant idealized, nor as equal an opportunity. We are born out of and into contexts. Phylogeny itself is a developmental process that takes place in historical context. Is this what you are getting at?

Cynthia

### **11.18. Date: Tue, 3 Aug 1993 16:38:46 -0700**

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
Subject: modularity and context  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Cynthia- I can send out context and modularity on e-mail if you like (I think) but it needs its diagrams to be reasonably communicative. I will send hardcopy.

I am not sure how general the interest is on xlchc regarding this issue so I am not sure at what level to respond here.

My ideas about modularity come from a combination of places, but come together in my reading of the literature on human development. A position I argue explicitly against is that "first comes the module, then the culture." This is wrong in phylogenetic/cultural perspective (see Geertz on the error of thinking that the superorganic is not also organically required for brains to work) and it is wrong in the microperspective, of the kind in recent literature on modularity. I am taking Karmiloff-Smith's recent book, "Beyond Modularity" with me on vacation along with Edelman, both of which will be relevant here. I believe it is important to take the weaving together of phylogeny and cultural history a la Vygotsky very seriously, but not his suggestion that the weaving starts with the onset of oral language, unless we take that beginning back to birth at least.

Note that Rich Shweder, in *Thinking Through Cultures* argues that cultural psychology combines a natural science (but not physics) world view with a semiotic world view. Lerner calls this the need for a system that combines both the organic and contextual world hypotheses (a la Pepper if that makes sense).

What connections/objections/additions do others have on this topic?

mike

### **11.19. Date: Tue, 03 Aug 93 22:30:43 EDT**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.BitNet>  
Subject: Modularity etc.  
To: General Forum <XLCHC@UCSD.BitNet>

Following started out as a message just to Mike Cole, but now I think I should share it on the net. Please make allowances. JAY.

Mike,

I for one would surely like to see your modularity paper and its arguments. Sounds like one of the places where we have been pursuing similar agendas using different sources/discourses.

I'm not sure which metaphors of modularity you're using in the discussion. Sounds like cognitive function modules in the brain, which bothers me because brain functions and semiotic functions (which is what cognitive functions amount to in most versions) should NOT map smoothly onto one another. They should be incommensurable, just as the signifier is "arbitrary" in relation to the signified. Realist assumptions tend to drive most arguments that want to ground the cultural semiotic in the natural, and for European culture also universal, materiality of the brain.

In some recent reflections on Lyotard's postmodern critique of modernist "unities" I have been coming to the conclusion that we can allow the physics end of natural science discourses a certain pseudo-universality, insofar as we need some common denominator of pseudo-commensurability to account for the material interdependencies of interactivity and the "parts" of larger ecosocial supersystems. But we need then to insulate them from the discourses of MEANINGFUL wholeness in these systems, so that that wholeness can be seen to be a projection from our standpoints (like the pattern of stars that seem to form a constellation, as seen from here). I can send you a more developed account of this argument, though I am still working it through.

In any case, I would want to look very carefully at how the FUNCTION that defines a module get transported in the discourse from cognitive-semiotic function to BRAIN function. My bet is there's many a slip twixt the cup (brain-pan?) and the lip (of speech, meaning-making)!

JAY.

:Jay Lemke Mike Cole 8/03/93\*modularity and context

JAY LEMKE.

City University of New York.

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### **11.20. Date: Wed, 04 Aug 93 12:14 EDT**

From: CHRIS ROBINSON <CHRIS\_ROBINSON@carleton.ca>

Subject: LOGIC OF MODULARITY

To: XLCHC@UCSD.EDU

Dear Mike and others,

You can, if you like, add a couple easy-to-read, but important readings to your list. The first would be to re-read the first chapter of Luria's old book. In chapter one of *The Working Brain*, Luria provides all the logic behind the concept of a functional system. Too often, I find, modularists sound like they equate the term function to the 'function of a particular tissue.' They also don't seem to understand that parts of the brain, in concrete activity, can form functional links with external tools and therefore create a functional system (or 'unit') that EXTENDS BEYOND THE CONFINES OF THE SKULL. But my suspicions of modularism may only reflect my ignorance of it.

The second 'good read' is more recent, and spells out the higher logic of modularity (but not modularISM) by contrasting it with its opposite. It's by the Natural Historian Stephen Jay Gould in February issue of *Natural History* 1992. It's also in his new book, as I saw while browsing through the book store, but I can't

remember the name of the book. (Something like Three Little Piggies....does anybody out there know???). Oh yes , the name of the article is Mozart and Modularity Seeing how modularity works in evolutionary theory helps one to better understand how it should work in psychology.

Chris  
Christopher Robinson  
Carleton University  
Ottawa, CANADA

### **11.21. Date: 08/04/93**

From: AGATTI@BRUSP.ANSP.BR  
Subject: Eugene-Mike-Kant-Agatti's comments  
To: "xlchc@ucsd.BitNet" <xlchc@ucsd.BitNet>

Here are my comment's [between [] on Eugenes's comments as summarized by Mike) and on Mike's comments.

Three main ideas in Mike's summary: a) According to Kant, in order for experience to become thinkable it should be transformed into categories. b) Those categories themselves, as Kant showed, can't be derived from experience and exist before any experience(,) a priori. ...

[Categories are called in order for experiences to become thinkable. Since, according to b), categories cannot be derived from experience, they are a priori, before any experience. They should be void of any contents. This is absolutely unthinkable. Categories are round squares. If anything exists it is an hoc hic et nunc. Anything that exists is individual( even an emotion, a thought, etc.). To evoke categories as a way out to solve this most basic epistemological problem, is a deus ex machina creation strategy, an opium facit dormire quia quia habet virtutem dormitivam strategy. I am aware that what I am saying is frontally against such "concepts" as general concepts, structures, etc. Shouldn't we confess that up to the present time no real solution was ever proposed to this basic problem? Only verbal solutions are seen in the history of philosophy, which do not resist to any meaning test. We see, then, that an even more basic question is: what is the meaning of meaning? When does a sign(=a word for instance, have meaning and when is it a pseudosignal? What's the test of meaning? ]

c)I think Kant is right that categorical thinking origins not in manipulation with physical environment but transcends it. I would argue that categorical thinking origins in social interaction and cultural guidance.)

[This c) sentences are strange. The manipulation of physical environment is not a physical manipulation. It is an experienced manipulation, otherwise it wouldn't exist for a subject. Thus, this manipulation entails the same epistemological problems

as the mentioned "social interaction and cultural guidance". Evoking social and cultural factors does not solve the mentioned problems.]

----- What follows are (I suppose) Mike's comments:

a)one does not want to toss out the "a priori" of Kant interpreted as structuration arising in the phylogenetic history of the species/individual, but would want to place it in a complementary relationship with sociocultural-historical structuration. b)That is, we need something like BOTH modularity AND context, understood respectively as phylogenetic and cultural-historical sources of mental structure. Neither are sufficient-- also critical is the active appropriation of the environment (by) the individual.

[Can Kant's "a priori" be interpreted as a " structuration arising in the phylogenetic history of the species/individual?" I think this would contradict Kant's apriority premisses. Phylogenetic history, although a very, very old history also and again raises the empiricist- idealist ( critical ) issue. Thus the modularity (phylogenetic)-context (cultural-historical) proposal ( see b ) cannot be accepted as sources of the individual's mental structures.]

**11.22. Date: Thu, 05 Aug 1993 09:56:32 MET**

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From: Alfred Lang (Univ. Bern) <LANG@PSY.unibe.ch>  
Subject: Re: Agatti on Categories  
To: xlchc@PSY.unibe.ch CC: LANG@PSY.unibe.ch

Agatti comments (in part) thus on Mike's Comments on Eugene's theses:

"Categories are called in order for experiences to become thinkable. Since, according to b), categories cannot be derived from experience, they are a priori, before any experience. They should be void of any contents. This is absolutely unthinkable. Categories are round squares. If anything exists it is an hoc hic et nunc. Anything that exists is individual( even an emotion, a thought, etc.). To evoke categories as a way out to solve this most basic epistemological problem, is a deus ex machina creation strategy, an opium facit dormire quia quia habet virtutem dormitivam strategy. I am aware that what I am saying is frontally against such "concepts" as general concepts, structures, etc. Shouldn't we confess that up to the present time no real solution was ever proposed to this basic problem? Only verbal solutions are seen in the history of philosophy, which do not resist to any meaning test. We see, then, that an even more basic question is: what is the meaning of meaning? When does a sign(=a word for instance, have meaning and when is it a pseudosignal? What's the test of meaning? ] "

Categories in the philosophical sense of the most abstract concepts applicable to everything have been proposed in the history of thought in a number of genera and

species. The Kantian genus that Agatti appears to take for the categories are indeed round squares; but they are designed as such and they should be left in the continent where they were proposed, namely in epistemological Dualiland. That is, they were constructed to unite what had been taken for separate for no clear reasons, inner life of conscious experience and things out there to see and handle. They were, we are wiser today, probably a foul compromise, witness the many bastard species they generated in the 19th and 20th centuries. Sour conflicts produce sour compromises. When ported to dualist Psychocountry they became, not astonishingly, none better. And one makes oneself a fool when expecting from any subspecies of them a solution to any problem.

Category constructive essays are no more than generalized mirror-sessions of thinking, a sort of self-reflective musings of philosophers. There are category species of high heuristic fertility, such as Aristotle's and Kant's, to be sure. But equally sure, as no map, even less a global one, can lead you to everywhere, comes their time to be archived and new maps to be used. The Aristotelian and the Kantian editions still prevalent in most of our daily traffic are weak when it comes to the undeniable fact that we live in a dynamic, evolving world, since they assume a static setting and are not even well equipped to deal with chance.

There is a category species generated from 130 years ago in Boston that has an exciting potential to do the job for some times to come. I mean, of course, Charles S. Peirce's categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness. It makes no sense to try to explain them in a few words, you rather get an idea of them gradually when dwelling in the land of their's. Indeed, Agatti, when you ask for the meaning of meaning, I think, you are on the path of a crucial question. But asking the question this way, you phrase it in Dualistiquese. If you do not want to give up the term meaning, I would suggest you ask, more specifically how meaning can have effects, and what effects. Does a word "have" meaning, or "is" it meaning, or does it "signal" meaning? What is a "pseudosignal"? Does is have or signal or be a pseudo- meaning? Or does a sign perhaps generate meaning? Or does it generate other signs which in turn...?

When presentday psychology is asking such questions, it is not really convincing in its answers, we seem to agree. But what do you mean by "the test of meaning"?

By the way, if you are interested in Peirce, read him. Most convenient entry the 1992 first of two volumes: *The Essential Peirce*, (Kloesel & Houser eds.), Bloomington, Indiana U. Press. And perhaps join the newly founded e-mail platform PEIRCE-L. Subscribe in a message to [LISTSERV@TTUVM1.TTU.EDU](mailto:LISTSERV@TTUVM1.TTU.EDU) with the single line in the message body: SUB PEIRCE-L <YourFirstName> <YourLastName> <YourLocation> You can anytime quit in the same way with the line

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Have Fun! Alfred

[next AL message](#)**11.23. Date: Thu, 5 Aug 1993 15:38:43 -0700**

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)  
Subject: context/modularity  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

I would like to make the following suggestion for expediency's sake and perhaps for the longer run value of a discussion on this topic. the expediency constraints are that I am about to go on vacation to no-computer-network-land and that it would be a good thing if we shared more of a common referent by this topic before we leap into trying to understand each other in nuanced way. The longer run possibility is that we those interested would pause and then either read and/or summarize their "favorite" piece relevant to this discussion, and then post it in September, we might be better off.

I promise (threaten?) the following: I will read Karmiloff- Smith's \*Beyond Modularity\* and post a summery when I get back about it. If others would post summaries of their nominees, we would get an interesting initial map of the territory. I certainly second Chris R's suggestion of Ch. 1 of Working Brain and I loooooove Steve Gould so will go read that. Has anyone got a precis of the Morton and Johnson Face Recognition work handy?

mike cole

**11.24. Date: Thu, 5 Aug 93 19:03:42 EDT**

From: Martin.Packer@um.cc.umich.edu  
Subject: Kantian categories  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Can I add my two cents on Kant and his categories? The problem for a Kantian, it seems, is that the categories that Kant claimed to have demonstrated the logical necessity of were the categories of Newtonian space and time. The reason mathematical laws were so good at describing and predicting physical phenomena, Kant claimed, was that the a priori categories of mind imposed structure on those phenomena. But as we now know, the Newtonian categories are not universally true but at best a local approximation to the large-scale structure of space-time, and so they are presumably experiential. At least, they cannot be a priori, as Kant claimed.

A few months ago I was reading Stanley Rosen's book "Hermeneutics as politics." The following rough notes constitute my attempt to make sense of Rosen's dense text. Rosen argues for a continuity between the enlightenment and postmodernity (!), in large part through a re-reading of Kant, especially the political and moral philosophy of the third critique and the piece that poses the rhetorical question

What is Enlightenment? Kant, argues Rosen, accomplished several things that he didn't intend to do, but did nonetheless. One was to come to appreciate that Being is always being-interpreted. Kant in fact proceeds empirically, nor just by logical deduction: he creatively constructs speculative first-principles from which his arguments then proceed. In doing this he engages in rhetoric, not in the sense of trying to convince us of something he knows is false, but in the sense of acknowledging that his starting place is a speculative one. It's like a (Cartesian) mathematician saying "Suppose we construct a circle centre 0,0, radius 1..." The speculative move is the transcendental one, where we stop allowing our thoughts to conform to nature and make nature conform to our thoughts - or, as Kant puts it, recognize that this is so.

Rosen argues that Kant was determined to create a new kind of human, to move us from our self-imposed immaturity, a state where guardians must deceive us for our own good. But now we have sufficient scientific knowledge and moral wisdom that we can each avow our freedom and recognize our own creative power. The autonomy that comes from doing this confirms Kant's move, and hence his autonomy. In giving us his interpretation of human being in this way, as an interpretation that is confirmed only in its adoption, Kant (suggests Rosen) anticipates the replacement of theory with hermeneutics, and of mathematics with history.

Interesting, huh?

Martin Packer

### **11.25. Date: Fri, 6 Aug 93 21:23:08 EDT**

From: Martin.Packer@um.cc.umich.edu  
Subject: Kant again...  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

A couple of people have asked if I would clarify the comments I recently sketched here about Stanley Rosen's views on Kant; I'll give it a shot. I think Rosen is suggesting that there is no final account of the character and genesis of human knowledge, or of human being for that matter. What it is to be (a) human is always already something preinterpreted (by the culture lived in, in significant part). What counts as human knowledge, and the way it is achieved and dealt with, are matters that are agreed upon and contested in ways that are characteristic of the times and the practices. Any statement about human knowledge begins with these shared understandings and differences, it cannot shortcut or replace them.

It can, however, strive to influence and change them. Kant's account of a priori categories is an account of the active, constructive role of the individual thinker, with guarantees of truth built right in to the cognitive system, so to speak. Such an account obviously runs counter to notions of a divine truth revealed only to



receptive, faithful sinners, or Plato's view that an elite should run the state and deceive the majority for the latter's benefit. Kant's account of the autonomous thinker, although presented rhetorically as a demonstration from first principles, and couched in the mathematical language that was gaining so much prestige at the time, is actually, suggests Rosen, a political and persuasive text, itself the product of Kant's own political autonomy (and bravery). If others found it convincing, and started to act upon it, it would become 'true' as a consequence.

I hope that helps!

Martin Packer

### **11.26. Date: Fri, 06 Aug 93 23:05:40 EDT**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.BitNet>  
Subject: Categories, meaning  
To: General Forum <XLCHC@UCSD.BitNet>

Categories, meaning.

Perhaps this is not the place for another purely philosophical discussion, but I think we may need to have thought about some of these matters as we get round to Edelman, modularity, etc. when Mike gets back and we've all caught up our reading.

Agatti seemed to me to be talking more about ordinary categories, and Lang more about Grand Categories. We all know, I think, though perhaps mathematicians and natural scientists, who have to invent and operate on them, know more intimately than most, that ordinary categories are a sort of mere name. Our semantic habits prefer nouns for abstractions, rather than long strings of verbs or clauses that would more directly summarize what we do when we make or use a category. We construct relations of similarity among particulars, instances, whatever we take later to be the members of the category. To be systematic and thorough, and in most cases of actual practice, we do this two by two (i.e. pair-wise: A is like B), and we use in fact a different strategy for construing the similarity of each pair (necessarily since we must deal with unique particulars, ignore many possible difference and alternative bases for making a similarity, etc.). We then have something like what Wittgenstein would call a family by resemblances.

We don't actually do the next step, unless we have to, but allow our language's semantics, and a whole lot of assumed reference to details in many, many texts other than our own, to do it for us, but in order to build the nearest thing to an extensional category that can logically exist, we now need construct second-order similarities among the first-order similarities already constructed for all the pairs, and so on up the hierarchy of logical types (similarities of similarities of similarities, i.e. relations of relations of relations) until we have constructed, or in

fact in most case merely assumed the existence of and prematurely named, a vertiginously abstract principle that unites all members of what we now take to be a category.

No wonder people yearn for something like prototypes to simplify all this! and I think we can be pretty sure that whether by prototypes, or by other means, all our categories represent shortcuts with respect to the enormous logical task of actually trying to build a category and know how we built it.

The most common shortcuts are semantic, mainly verbal, abetted somewhat by visual semiotics (and of course in less academically refined, and phylogenetically and ontogenetically earlier matters, by the semiotics of touch, body-sense, movement, and action generally). Natural languages bring with them built-in systems of categorization, which fit rather loosely with the cultural folk- categories used to interpret them, and they also supply means for constructing new sorts of more ad hoc categories. The former tend to resemble, not surprisingly, various discoveries and interpretations of Grand Categories (the ones that, as Lang says, seem to apply to everything); the latter are the more ordinary categories, but again these are mostly culturally and sometimes lexically sedimented (i.e. institutionalized) in the language (used, as it must always be, symbiotically with other materially embodied semiotic resource systems) as she be used in the culture.

In caricature: ordinary categories are slapdash bricolage of piecemeal logic, yawning gaps, and overdependence on linguistic and cultural habits, while Grand Categories are philosophical intuitions about the deeply implicit semantics of the natural languages and other semiotic systems used by the philosopher.

Of course all these things change. Maybe not their NAMES, of course (SPACE, ENERGY, INFORMATION, CAUSALITY, chairs, humans, etc.), but certainly the principles by which we assign similarities to at least some pairs of members (or classes of members, since the language makes that all too easy to do). And that is when we can see how we make and mis-make ordinary categories, and how Grand Categories, or the basic parameters of our inherited semantic and semiotic resource tools, shape and are reshaped in turn as we USE them in material/semiotic activity.

This is the point at which I get interested in how the brain, or more properly the whole of the material body and its material extensions coupling to an environment defined by that coupling, is shaped ontogenetically (and our kind, very indirectly, phylogenetically) by NOT quite recapitulating the self-organizing paths of our phylogeny (biological and cultural, ecosocial) as we interact and get self-organized.

A footnote on meaning. Meaning is a RELATION, not a thing or even a category. It is a very odd sort of relation, too, both binary and irreducibly ternary. There are many sorts of meaning, as well, depending on what categories of "things" are being

related to each other. There are meaning-relations between words (ie. word-to-word), and between whole sentences, and between whole visual figures. There are our favorites: relations between words (usually not one at a time) and "situations" (which have to be in semiotic form to enter into a meaning-relation with the semiotic forms of words). There is a meaning relation between two sets of these sorts when the probabilities of all possible combinations (one from set A, one from set B) are NOT equal. The PARTICULAR meaning relation between an A and a B, depends, ALWAYS (this is the ternary part) on some further "context" C, such as what language you are speaking, what your culture says makes sense about the world, etc. (Formally, a C is a set of conditions under which the probabilities are calculated, or the frequencies obtain.)

It gets worse (or better), since there is no limit to the number of levels of metacontextualization in such a purely relational theory of meaning. The relation of the As and Bs varies depending on which C we are in; but different subcultures may keep the same pairings of A and B, but assign them to different Cs, so there is now a further level of context, D. And so on. The act of meaning- making, of semiosis, is the act of contextualization, of assigning a pair A,B to a context C (all semiotic, of course; no "real world" here!); i.e. constructing a C-relation between an A and a B. This is basically Bateson's theory of metaredundancy. It is very powerful, probably the most powerful possible theory of meaning in a strictly mathematical sense. Everything that has information is a special case. The problem with such powerful theories is that they have relatively little to say about their instances; but they are very useful for avoiding the limitations necessarily built into any particular less powerful theory.

Thesis: the human brain is NOT well adapted to this kind of thinking!

JAY.

JAY LEMKE.

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**11.27. Date: Sat, 07 Aug 1993 12:53:38 MET**

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From: Alfred Lang (Univ. Bern) <LANG@PSY.unibe.ch>  
Subject: RE: Kant again...  
To: xlchc@PSY.unibe.ch CC: LANG@PSY.unibe.ch

Thanks, Martin, that helps (I seem not be the only one to have troubles with what you first said of Stanely Rosen whom I don't know). I certainly agree about the basic political stance of Kant and his bravery. He was in fact for 10 years or so under a sort of censure and reacted quite bravely to authorities. And his very important role

in creating the modern German university model, including much influence on the American University, has been motivated no little by that experience (Der Streit der Fakultäten, 1798).

But the paradoxical nature of his anthropology or his image of man remains. On the one hand humans are thought to be free and responsible individuals, on the other it is in their best interest to think that and thus what the universal principles they are endowed with demand. And universal is Vernunft, though distributed with every individual. Universal means not only everytime and everywhere, there is also no chance for true development.

Agreed, this is sloppy brief phrasing. But that way you are pushed to see the affinity of this thinking to older christian faith paradoxes. God has created humans free, but He knows and intends what they shall do. The controversies among the different confessions in that time of accelerating secularization was to a large extent about that paradox. I cannot help but see Kant's reason as another form of divinity. I cannot see wherein an "active, constructive role of the individual" really is grounded more than in wishful thinking.

The dilemma, by the way, is caught in as grandiose and amusing, if not terrifying, manner -- considered the present state of the the free world --- in Richard Wagner's Ring der Nibelungen: Wotan, the God wanting to be free and human, but entangled in the eternal contracts he has necessarily engaged himself.

This I wanted to contrast with Herder's magnificent proposal to see humans in evolving dialogue with nature, both becoming cultured in the process.

Alfred

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## **11.28. Date: Sun, 8 Aug 93 19:51:24 -0700**

From: ematusov@cats.ucsc.edu  
Subject: Kant and we  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Let's me make a few comments about our wonderful discussion about Kant.

I see three global topics in the discussion (maybe there is something else that I haven't recognized yet). One topic is that Kant should be forgotten for the sake of better philosophers coming after him. Another topic is an issue about modularity and experience or context as Mike Cole put it. The third topic is an interpretative approach that emerges from Kant's writing pointing out at the fact that we deal not with things-in-themselves and even not with experience of dealing with things-in-themselves but with interpretations of dealing with experience of things-in-themselves.

I personally enjoy with all three topics but the third one is really mine (not in terms of authorship but in terms of involvement).

The slogans to throw Kant "off the ship of modernity" (from the manifesto of Russian poets-futurists, 1912) mean that some of interpretations of Kant's writings have been completed, there is nothing new that Kant might say about some topics. For example, let's take a topic of dualism vs. monism. Indeed, Kant was a dualist, he didn't discussed much this topic, besides there is almost nothing to discuss: dualism is bad, monism is good.

However, I don't think that the discussion about dualism is over. It is not because dualistic approaches are still overwhelmingly dominated psychology and other social science areas but because, in my view, there are a lot of exciting things left to be discussed.

From Kant's perspective, both dualistic and monistic approaches can be called "naive realism." To illustrate this point let me give a metaphoric analogy. A dualist describing the moon says that the moon has two sides. He forgets that "two sidedness" is not a characteristic of the moon but limitation of perceptual system an observer who can't observe the whole surface of the moon at one moment. A monist painting a profile of human face draws two eyes because she knows that humans have two eyes forgetting the observer's perspective. In sum, dualist assigns subjectivity to object, monist assigns objectivity to subject. Well, how should it be "as a matter of fact?" (I have some irony in this positivistic "as a matter of fact.")

"As a matter of fact," what both dualist and monist are doing with objects is not only what they are doing for their own sake but for sharing their experience with others, for communication, for saying "stories" to others. I insist that Kant was right that there is something that "transcends" experience with objects. And this "something" is not "modularity" or body's limitations as Mike Cole assumes from my previous e-mail writing (at least I didn't mean it). This "something" is listener, the sociocultural nature of human being. People make deal with meanings that emerge from relationship between experience and communication with others. People's experience is not silent, it communicates to others and for others, it subordinates to communication.

Eugene Matusov

University of California at Santa Cruz

**11.29. Date: Tue, 10 Aug 93 19:16:36 -0700**

From: ematusov@cats.ucsc.edu  
Subject: message that didn't reach the network  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

By mistake I sent my previous message to Antonio Agatti not through the network but through just ordinary response e-mail. Yesterday you got through the network Antonio's response on my response. I want to repeat my message that you didn't get and apologize for this mess.

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07/29/93

Hi, Antonio.

Your message on 07/29/93 beautifully illustrates Kant's doubts in pure reason. Indeed, if things are identical, they are incomparable because we can't make a difference between them. If they are different, they are again incomparable because there is nothing in common in them.

The problem is that you, like Kant, want to use one category from a dichotomy peer of categories (e.g., identity and difference). The point of Hegel's dialectics is that things are different and similar at the same time. What is striking and exciting in this point that things are different and similar not in some separable aspects of the things but in THE SAME aspects! Comparison of things is an ACT of construction relationship between the things. Relationship is what makes the things identical and different at the same time. Relationship is abstract and concrete (symbolic and perceptual, if you prefer psychological rather than philosophical reflection).

A few more notes. I feel that you took Ellen Watson's sentence about the Empiricist's view of mind, experience, and abstraction a little bit out of context that Ellen used. I think, she didn't try to make a point with this sentence. Rather she used those labels to refer to the Empiricist's philosophical tradition where there was not made difference between mind and intellect. Ellen wrote her message in the context of my previous statement a week or so ago that, unlike British Empiricists, in German philosophical tradition and in Russian philosophical and psychological traditions, the difference between mind and intellect was made.

My last comment. Mind without experience is NOT like computer without DOS as you said. Mind as well as world do not exist without experience. Mind is not a structure, architecture, or a thing, like a computer. It is a process, an activity. Also, world is not physical environment that is indifferent to organism. It is relationship between the organism and ITS environment.

Eugene Matusov

University of California at Santa Cruz.

**11.30. Date: 08/09/93 Mon, 09 Aug 93 11:29:50 BD2**

From: AGATTI@BRUSP.ANSP.BR  
Subject: similarity-difference-identity and singularity  
To: "xlchc@ucsd.BitNet" <xlchc@ucsd.BitNet>

Dear Eugene, I would like to comment on your reply . Eugene: "... if things are identical, they are incomparable because we can't make a difference between them. If they are different, they are again incomparable because there is nothing in common in them.

Agatti: Don't you think that to the sign(=word) identity nothing can correspond (like: round square)? Nothing. Even autoidentity. (This has of course, consequences on Logics (and) Mathematics...) The expression: "identical things" would have no meaning.

Eugene: The problem is that you, like Kant, want to use one category from a dichotomy peer of categories (e.g., identity and difference).

Agatti: I am precisely criticising these two terms. Only singularity would exist.

Eugene: The point of Hegel's dialectics is that things are different and similar at the same time. What is striking and exciting in this point that things are different and similar not in some separable aspects of the things but in THE SAME aspects.

Agatti: If similarity, difference and identity disappear how can we accept Hegel's ideas, at least in this context? Please,remember that I am not criticising any philosopher in particular. I am just trying (trying) to be logical. I have no answers. Just objections. How can things be different and similar at the same time? Do these two concepts imply another logic, a non(non-contradiction) one? . Eugene Relationship is abstract and concrete (symbolic and perceptual, if you prefer psychological rather than philosophical reflection).

Agatti: I found it interesting the correspondence you propose: abstract-simbolic and concrete-perceptual. But would you say that when you say: "beauty is abstract", abstract is equivalent to symbolic?

Eugene: Comparison of things is an ACT of construction (of) relationship between the things. Relationship is what makes the things identical and different at the same time.

Agatti Construction of relationship is an act of a being who is both conscious and who has memory. Things ( in themselves...? ) are completed unrelated. It is conscious memory that relates past perceptions: cat and animal, for instance ( subject and predicate, generally ). But I don't see how relationship makes the things identical and different at the same time. Specially if the signs identity and

difference are considered void of contents. What role is relationship playing? How can it engender impossible things?

Eugene: My last comment. Mind without experience is NOT like computer without DOS as you said. Mind as well as world do not exist without experience. Mind is not a structure, architecture, or a thing, like a computer. It is a process, an activity. Also, world is not physical environment that is indifferent to organism. It is relationship between the organism and ITS environment.

I do agree with you. What I tried to say is this: Mind without memories of past experiences is the famous W. James': big, booming confusion. Nothing is related to nothing.

### **11.31. Date: Mon, 09 Aug 1993 21:00:58 MET**

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From: Alfred Lang (Univ. Bern) <LANG@PSY.unibe.ch>  
Subject: RE: Kant and we  
To: xlchc@PSY.unibe.ch CC: LANG@PSY.unibe.ch

Eugene,

In disentangling three threads of our discussion on categories, you are certainly right, but let me comment on two of them.

In the first point ("Kant should be forgotten for the sake of better philosophers coming after him") you go perhaps, I think, a bit beyond of what I have been aiming at. More below. As to the second ("modularity and experience or context as Mike Cole put it") I agree with Jay Lemke that Grand categories of the philosophers and the generalizations made by people operating in everyday settings are perhaps two distant poles, but probably of the same kind, following similar, somehow Roschian, laws of the mind.

And, thirdly, as to your preferred theme of seeing Kant's pointing to "the fact that we deal not with things-in-themselves and even not with experience of dealing with things-in-themselves but with interpretations of dealing with experience of things-in-themselves" I am not sure whether you are perhaps already caught by Kant. So you assume dualism for granted: there the "thing", here the interpreting experiencer; there the object, here the subject; perhaps matter there and mind here? How can you put the Thing-in-itself in the plural, since you cannot know anything about it? And how can you then possibly interpret your experience of "them"?

I would never say: throw Kant off. His questions have been valid, produced by thinking forward in the traditions given. The futurists, probably, did not mean Kant so much, but rather neo-Kantian idealism which he cannot really be made



responsible for. Kant is a very high value because of his putting the question of the possibility of knowledge so sharply. That he failed in answering it validly is normal and is quite important in rendering us capable of avoiding similar roads. That he failed with that chimera "Thing-in-itself" gives way to starting with our relation with the world rather than with us here and it there.

Yes, at the heart of that question as of that failure are dualistic assumptions, at least two of them. But overcoming dualism does not leave (materialistic) monism single, no more than overcoming communism leaves capitalism the only way for social life. What we oppose as materialistic or idealistic monisms, today, are mostly, in my opinion, disguised dualisms. For, to describe and deal with matter, you need concepts; and who would defend them to be material? And whatever you want to defend as being spiritual -- God, ideas, mind, thought, language, mathematics, the circle, the point, space, time, continuity, rationality, meaning, beliefs, or, perhaps, emotions, pure or dirty, ... -- it stops having effects if not embodied and yet I cannot see how you would, as a materialist, defend all of those examples and more as being not real.

Sure, I agree, dualism is with us, and for some time yet. It is not to be overcome by denying it. It needs to be dissolved. As to presentday scientific materialism, you might have heard of science looking so rational to us because it succeeds in disguising most of its irrationality, (The saying is ascribed, as far as I know, to Wolfgang Pauli, one of the leading scientific figures of the century, and perhaps inflicted under the burden of his insights.)

But that dissolution and replacement of ill defined basic terms (the concepts originally behind them are long since nebulous and dark) by another set of views is a lengthy process still in its infancy. It has a very strong, entangling meshwork of habits against it. Metaphors and speech games might occasionally help, occasionally lead into dead-ends. Kant after Descartes is a very strong force, indeed, effective towards the split of the realms of the known coming in the open in the 19th century and determining the 20th. And psychology is certainly one of the sciences affected by him most strongly, rather directly and not in a fruitful way. He denied psychology being possible as an empirical science which is only consequential when he says the essential cognitive endowment of the mind is of eternal character.

So, instead of looking into processes demonstrating the dialogical and mutual constitution of humans and their culture, his thoughts reinforced that the real was thought to dwell in matter by one party and to be out of incorporated space and time by the other. When the latter, in addition to thinking it universal (e.g. Hegel) also individualized this contemporary version of the divine and then (e.g. Schopenhauer) proposed to look for it in the individual brains, that strange psychophysical pseudo-problem was created which still dwells in our textbooks and determines as a broader (generalized Fechnerian) paradigm psychological methodology and conceptuality.

For: why do we investigate how a given world (stimulus, situation) determines reactions and development of people and not as much how people generate the world they live in? And why do we not investigate the conditions that lead psychologists to make the situations they put their subjects into just as the do it and not otherwise? Why do we claim we investigate people's mental processes, although what we analyze is some of their linguistic production under often quite peculiar circumstances? Why do we think we need to separate what people do and say from what its meaning may be!

And how come psychology (in the large sense of what people think of people in general, scientifically or otherwise) did split into a natural science and a humanities' fraction? Why had and has the former so much more chances in academe? Why is it, that none would be better, if the latter would win the day? Perhaps, psychology, sometimes, is so irrational, because it prospers declaring one particular rationality absolute.

Clearly, our psychology is a child of dualism, open or disguised, and also its victim.

With best wishes towards another one, Alfred

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### **11.32. Date: Tue, 10 Aug 93 20:33:46 -0700**

From: ematusov@cats.ucsc.edu  
Subject: re-similarity-difference-identity and singularity  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Here is my response on Antonio Agatti's message "similarity- difference-identity and singularity" on 08/09/93.

1. Issue of identity. I agree with you, Antonio, that philosophical categories taken as themselves become empty abstractions. One of solution to escape this emptiness (suggested by Hegel) is to focus on the process of changing categories when category transforms in its opposition.

2. Issue of singularity. My personal view about monism, taking it out of the context of our ongoing discussion about Kant's and Hegel's writing, is not univocal. On the one hand, I dislike dualism and monism equally strong. In my view, both of them reflect positivism. Dualism is positivism on a theoretical level; while monism is positivism on a meta-theoretical level. On the other hand, both dualism and monism are cultural events. It is interesting to try to interpret them, why both of them have been in our culture for a while.

3. Issue of logic. When I said about things being different and similar at the same time I meant Hegel's logic of change (not logic of thing) or dialectics. In the logic of

change contradictions reflect a process rather than signal that there is something wrong in thinking.

4. Issue of abstract-symbolic. I didn't say that "abstract is equivalent to symbolic" or perceptual is equivalent to concrete. I just meant some psychological approaches that are implying that.

5. Issue about relationship. Let me give an example of what I meant by saying, "Comparison of things is an ACT of construction relationship between the things. Relationship is what makes the things identical and different at the same time." Our parallel network discussion about feminism is going around the issue of woman's equality with man. Straightforward attack on the issue requesting equality in terms of symmetry and interchangeability between woman and man is failed (I don't want to discuss why, it is on the network). Skipping details, we are coming to the conclusion that the solution of the problem lies in constructing such a relationship between man and woman that makes them equal while being diverse.

6. Issue about memory. Antonio, I didn't get clear understanding of what you wanted to say about memory. If you want to say that mind re-experiences something time to time, I would agree. But if you want to say that each time individual blinks s/he uses her/his memory to remember what the surrounding is about, I would disagree. Maybe it was neither nor, please, specify. I think it is interesting to discuss what "now" means and how it includes past and future.

Eugene Matusov

University of California at Santa Cruz

### **11.33. Date: Wed, 11 Aug 93 21:51:54 EDT**

From: Martin.Packer@um.cc.umich.edu  
Subject: Kant, Edelman, and wishful thinking  
To: xlhc@ucsd.edu

Alfred, I found your comments about the lingering divinity in Kant's anthropology interesting. You pointed out the paradox that an account of humans as free and responsible is coupled with the injunction that we are logically required to be that way. (I hope I do your formation of this justice here.) And the parallel you draw with older Christian divinity sounds right to me.

I haven't read Herder (perhaps you can suggest some points of access), so I can't judge to what extent he avoids such paradoxes. But I find myself wondering if they really can be avoided. MacIntyre (After Virtue) talks of all the enlightenment philosophers struggling to reconcile a conception of human nature (Is) and a view of the good life (Ought). Kant's deontological ethics is just one failed attempt to fit these two together. But the contradictions like this in thinking are presumably what

drive us forward. You say that Kant's image of the active, constructive role of the individual "is grounded more in wishful thinking than reality." I find myself wondering if *\*all\** conceptions of development aren't part wishful thinking, in the sense that they project an endpoint to our human existence which can only come into being if we intend it.

And what you call "Herder's magnificent proposal" of "humans in evolving dialogue with nature, both becoming cultured in the process" can be said to be wishful too, no, in the face of the massive environmental degradation we see around us? But no less essential an image and goal for that.

I'm now beginning to wonder how Edelman's evolutionary neurology looks when one views it as, in part, wishful thinking (a felicitous phrase, that). That's to say, does it present us with an Ought disguised as an Is? Does it contain an image of what we can become, and provide us with a way of thinking about what or who we are that guides us in the right direction?

I have only Oliver Sacks' article in the New York Review to go on, and I can't tell how much Sacks borrows Edelman's metaphors and conveys his anthropology, but he makes some very suggestive points. Sacks says that Edelman's neural Darwinism "coincides with our sense... that all we experience and do is, implicitly, a form of self-expression, and that we are destined, whether we wish it or not, to a life of particularity and self-development; it coincides, finally, with our sense that life is a journey-- unpredictable, full of risk and uncertainty, but, equally, full of novelty and adventure, and characterized (if not sabotaged by external constraints or pathology) by constant advance, an ever deeper exploration and understanding of the world." Certainly an image of development! It is, says Sacks, "the first biological theory of individuality and autonomy." And he emphasizes Esther Thelan's work showing that infants solve the same motor challenges (walking, reaching) in different ways, as a variety of solutions are explored and then the workable ones selected.

The image here seems to be one of plurality and cooperation - an appropriate one for our times, I'd say. I could add more interpretation of Sacks' words, but perhaps first I should ask, can anyone more familiar with Edelman's own writing tell us whether Sacks is shamelessly embroidering here?

Martin Packer

### **11.34. Date: Wed, 11 Aug 93 21:56:36 EDT**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.BitNet>  
Subject: Brain limits  
To: General Forum <XLCHC@UCSD.BitNet>

Several people have asked me for clarification of my somewhat offhand final remark in an earlier posting to the effect that our brains are not well adapted to a certain sort of higher-order relational meaning-making.

I don't have time now to do so very thoroughly, but in general I believe there are many sorts of potentially meaningful expressions that natural and formal codes can construct (we can construct with them as tools) that we can only process piecemeal because of what I assume are partly neurological limitations. Undoubtedly training and culture play a role in the relative ease of various sorts of these, but I think there may be a hard limit, and I am not generally given to appeals to neuroscience when talking about human meaning-making.

Anyway, here is a comment made to one of those who asked for a clarification:

comment. My point about what our brains are not good at is computing relations of relations of relations of relations of ... more than about 3 orders of logical typing over the arbitrary level of first focus, and holding all the lower levels in mind simultaneously while doing so -- i.e. the relations and their arguments (where the arguments are themselves relations with arguments which are relations etc.). We CAN do three at once; that is the foundation of semiosis (cf. Peirce's "thirdness"), and with a little headache some of us can sometimes do four. Frankly I don't think we are wired to do more than that, and I suspect even fourth-order metacontextualizing is a subjective illusion born of rapid oscillation between the "lower" and "upper" third-orders.

JAY.

JAY LEMKE.

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### **11.35. Date: Thu, 12 Aug 1993 09:15:35 +0200 (MET DST)**

From: raeithel@rzdspc1.informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)

Subject: Re: Brain limits

To: JLLBC%CUNYVM.BITNET@vxdsya.desy.de (Jay Lemke) Cc: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Jay--

I see where you found the argument against brains. It is a familiar one in A.I., used by connectionists against symbolists to fend off complaints that networks do not show much recursive structure (I hear that several new proposals were designed to overcome this).

However, I am not sure in what way we could say that language is doing something that brains can't do. In Hofstadter's "Goedel, Escher, Bach" there is the argument

that all the levels of relations of relations are bound back to the lowest by "strange loops", and that "the lowest level runs all by itself" anyway. I wonder whether the strategy of making nouns out of relations or processes helps the brains manage the level recursion problem. So language could have / include the means needed.

In any case, managing complexities in (yes, again) human self-regulation calls for brains plus other devices (symbolic, measuring as well as steering). If we find the right language to describe natural potentials of brains -- that was my original counter thought to your closing offhand comment -- we might be in a new position to design those other devices.

It is much too early to know where the limits of brains are. We are just beginning to understand what they are really doing "all by themselves".

Arne.

Arne Raeithel, psychology, U of Hamburg

### **11.36. Date: Thu, 12 Aug 1993 11:21:59 MET**

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From: Alfred Lang (Univ. Bern) <LANG@PSY.unibe.ch>  
Subject: Re: brain limitations  
To: xlchc@PSY.unibe.ch CC: LANG@PSY.unibe.ch

Jay and Arne,

isn't this issue of brain limits based on a lack of distinction between brain and, say, mind, or consciousness? Sure the brain is capable of dealing with recurrences -- otherwise we could not talk about, with courteous help, of course, of some symbolic system such as language. However, conscious experience is already ill at work with relations of relations, if not already with plain relations, and certainly out of the business with relations of relations of relations. This, on the other hand, goes very well with external symbol manipulation. Probably, that's why people invented mathematics and other nice things.

Psychology might finally find out, with the not so courteous help of cognitive science, what Charles Peirce knew very well, when he wrote in 1868:

"Accordingly, just as we say that a body is in motion, and not that motion is in a body we ought to say that we are in thought and not that thoughts are in us."

From "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities", in the Kloesel & Houser "The Essential Peirce" Paperback on page 42n\* or CP 5.289n1. The paper and those on which it builds, is worth the attention of psychologists, indeed.

Peirce, with the above sentence, was just drawing one (of many more) inference from his insight that "at no one instant in my state of mind is there cognition or representation, but in the relation of my states of mind at different instants there is." (same page or paragraph in the body of the text) Which insight, of course, illustrates exactly the present issue, in that the brain very well "cerebrates" relations while the mind (including language) appears to take them for elementary entities. And, in addition, psychologists, in shaping their competualities after language, have fallen into the trap.

Have a nice reading! Alfred

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### **11.37. Date: Thu, 12 Aug 1993 18:30:45 +0200 (MET DST)**

From: raeithel@rzdspc1.informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)  
Subject: Re: brain limitations  
To: LANG@PSY.unibe.ch Cc: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Alfred:

thanks for saying much more clearly what I had in mind:

- > ... that the brain very
- > well "cerebrates" relations while the mind (including language) appears
- > to take them for elementary entities.

I take this to be one of the most interesting riddles: It is very clear that the brain manages higher order relations effortlessly when working at motion regulation of the body or at Gestalt perception.

Yet, when confronted with psychologist's experimental setups demanding linguistic recursion capabilities, brains don't serve subjects well. In my behind-the-scenes remark to Jay I therefore said that maybe we haven't invented the languages yet with which we could show comparable proficiency at symbolic recursion...

My gut feeling is that these languages are of the diagrammatic kinds, and therefore are not (discursive) languages at all in the sense that most psycholinguists use the term.

Arne.

p.s. In parallel, I am reading PEIRCE-L discussion now. Thanks to Gary Shank, too, for bringing this to our attention here in XFAMILY.

**11.38. Date: Fri, 13 Aug 1993 18:52:01 MET**[back to table of AL messages](#)

From: Alfred Lang (Univ. Bern) <LANG@PSY.unibe.ch>  
Subject: Kant, Herder and wishful thinking  
To: xlchc@PSY.unibe.ch CC: LANG@PSY.unibe.ch

Martin,

you have raised a number of interesting points related to the Kant vs. Herder opposition and the wishful thinking perspectives. Sure, Herder's is also wishful, or, if you want to be nice with him, programmatic thinking, like Kant's. But the latter, is, for my reading at least, more decreptive. But the difference, perhaps, lies in Kant postulating something *ex principio*, while Herder points to types of transactional processes I can go and observe in all sorts of variants which I am capable of dealing with.

In a way, we have to do here with the old opposition between the belief in last principles (of which Kantianism is certainly not the most ominous) and the refutation of that belief. Variants of the latter are less easily pointed out because few people, even if they refute the idea of last principles right away, like to concede that fact publicly. So they might stick ecclectically and arbitrarily to some partial principle or at least do as if. Positivisms are of that species, and utilitarianism, of course, and their relatives in the epistemological, ethical or esthetical realms.

The controversy among pragmatists, early in the century and now, can be seen to circle around this. The Jamesian variant is often dangerously close to utilitarianism or, at least, it can be seen as such quite easily. Peirce on the other hand generalized the idea of last principles and, above all, admitted to their evolvability. So, perhaps, there is indeed a third road which to have pointed out Herder deserves much credit. The family tree is yet to be drawn in details. Among figures to be placed somewhere in or near its lineages are Schelling, Hegel, Humboldt, Marx, and Simmel. And the pragmatists certainly are candidates. Because the essence of the alternative is to look at the effects of people's deeds and the subsequent chains of effects rather than to ask whether they cognize, value or judge rightly now and forever.

To read Herder, I recommend two entry points. One is "Ueber den Ursprung der Sprache --- On the origin of language" (1770), the other the shorter and earlier version of his philosophy of history "Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit --- Another philosophy of the history on the formation of humankind" (1774). I am sorry to be unable to inform on English translations.

By the way, there is an intriguing replication of Herders understanding of the becoming of culture in a 1935 book of the Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsuro: *Fudo* (which literally means wind or climate, but has a broader meaning of active environment). Intriguing in a double sense, not only because it also like Herder and



Voelkerpsychologie, refers to national characters, but also because much of what Europeans emerged only slowly and gradually and against fronts of Christendom and Rationality is quite naturally part of East-Asian thought. Nin-gen, the Japanese for human, does not primarily refer to the individual but as much if not more to that what is "between" them.

Alfred E-mail on Internet: lang@psy.unibe.ch

### **11.39. Date: Fri, 13 Aug 1993 18:56:27 MET**

From: Alfred Lang (Univ. Bern) <LANG@PSY.unibe.ch>  
Subject: Edelman etc.  
To: xlchc@PSY.unibe.ch CC: LANG@PSY.unibe.ch

Please could anybody provide the detailed reference to the Edelmann book(s) and perhaps give the gist of it in summary. I try to imagine what is hidden there from what has been hinted at here and that reminded me of a book of 1982 of a Harry A. Klopf, an avionics engineer with excellent knowledge and original thoughts in biology and psychology, entitled "The hedonistic neuron: a theory of memory, learning, and intelligence". Washington, Hemisphere. does anybody know?

Klopf, in a parallel but broader campaign as Dawkins', proposes to turn things around of our overall scientific strategy of arbitrarily isolating pieces of the world to analyze and then being in pains of putting things together again, of making that terrible bricolage of the whole few of us try to do in vain while the rest is not even interested. Klopf says, you cannot reduce questions of organisms or person to answers on isolated cells or other microstructures of any kind. Instead, he prefers to take societies or persons as models for understanding their components, e.g. cells. So his central thesis is to assume that cell, in particular, neurons, are "interested" in maximization of their being excited (depolarized) and minimization of being inhibited (hyperpolarized). The point is, that they cannot do that singlehandedly by themselves, but need a suitable environment. This they find in their like, who (which, as you like), of course, seek the same. So they gather to build compounds, i.e. organisms, not unlike individual person gather to form groups and societies. In the course of their respective exchanges, naturally, they evolve their specialisations. Klopf presents then quite a concoction of pieces of illustrative evidence, more or less convincing, as little or much as it appeals to the taste of the reader. But the general idea of a very simple propensity, however metaphorically it is caught by Klopf, operating in an affine milieu, is very appealing, indeed.

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[next AL message](#)

**11.40. Date: Tue, 17 Aug 1993 20:49:38 -0700**

From: mcole@weber.ucsd.edu (Mike Cole)

Subject: On the matter of the mind

To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

We have gotten a copy of the NYReview article by Oliver Sacks reviewing Edelman's \*Bright air, brilliant fire: the matter of the mind. It strikes me that it might be a good vehicle for discussion with those who want going to the original.

To facilitate distribution of the article to those interested, we will xerox up copies for all who want and who send a stamped, selfaddressed envelope to Peggy Bengel, LCHC-0092, UCSD, La Jolla, CA. 92093.

When we get some idea of the demand, we will have some feeling for how many folks are interested and plan accordingly. mike

Michael Cole

Communication Department and Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition

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## 12. Hamburg Symposium 1993: 1 / 1

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### 12.1. Date: Sun, 31 Oct 1993 20:46:52 -0100

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)  
Subject: Call for contributions: Stern,Cassirer,Peirce,Vygotsky...  
To: peirce-l, xlchc

Dear scientists interested in the person as an evolving sign or symbol system!

This is a call for contributions to a Symposium planned in late September 1994 (25th to 29th) in Hamburg, Germany, at the bi-annual congress of the German Association of Psychology. This congress is to be centered on William Stern and his contribution to Differential Psychology and Personality Research. Stern's (1871-1938) seminal work going much beyond the above theme is not widely discussed today. It certainly had its influence on the cultural-historical school of Vygotsky and his followers and it also lives on in some other traditions, among them notably the transactional approach proposed by Stern's younger colleague Heinz Werner and by Seymour Wapner at Clark.

Some of us (among them Arne Raeithel of Hamburg and Helmut Pape of Montjoi well known to many of the present readers) have started some time ago a special interest group on Semiotics & Psychology in the German speaking world (supported to some extent by the two respective scientific associations). We would like to give the congress a special touch in the direction of person-culture-relations and also place some emphasis on the potential offered by semiotic concepts to further understanding constitution and development of theses relations which we feel to be crucial for the advancement of understanding the human condition.

At the University of Hamburg before 1933, among Stern's colleagues have been Ernst Cassirer and Jakob von Uexkuell in addition to the art historians Aby Warburg and Erwin Panofsky who all in all make a group of sorts of explicit and implicit semioticians and we know that they had an interest among them. As far as I can see such thinkers in addition to people like Peirce or Vygotsky or Werner have certainly something important to say to the mutual constitution of person and culture. Evidently, the contributions need not necessarily have a historical committal. Since to congress is explicitly interested in transdisciplinary openings a symposium in the sketched direction might be of interest to the psychologists present.



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## 13. Goals 1993: 4 / 68

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### 13.1. Date: Tue, 26 Oct 1993 10:34 EST

From: ELLICE@vms.cis.pitt.edu  
Subject: definition of goals  
To: xact

The notion of goals influencing the strategies that people use to solve problems seems to be a central concern in sociocultural research. Some salient examples that come to mind are the discussion of goals in the book, *The construction zone*, by Newman, Griffin, and Cole in which children were observed to use different strategies to solve the "same" task but in different social contexts. Also, Geoff Saxe has made the study of goals a major component of his work on children's mathematics in context. Geoff has argued that goals are emergent (as do Newman et al.) and dependent on a number of factors: social interaction, artifacts, prior knowledge, etc. Of course, goals hold a distinct place in Leont'ev's view of activity. My question is: does anyone have a definition of goals that is not just a set of attributes and is non-circular?

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### 13.2. Date: Fri, 29 Oct 93 23:30:59 EDT

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.BITNET>  
Subject: When is a strategy?  
To: Classroom Studies Group <XCLASS> cc: Activity Theory Group <XACT>

Some very interesting points have been made lately about the notions of strategy and goal in exploratory and "problem-solving" behavior, especially in collaborative groups.

Cynthia DuVal emphasized the emergent properties of Doing- interactively-in-social-and-material-environments when the activities of individuals or groups are regarded as self-organizing systems. The notion of a "strategy" or of a "goal" is highly problematic for such systems, and all the systems we are interested in in

the study of socially contextualized behavior are most usefully regarded as being of this sort.

I have done one paper exploring this perspective for the process of writing:

"Text Production and Dynamic Text Semantics." In E. Ventola, Ed. *Functional and Systemic Linguistics: Approaches and Uses*. [pp. 23-38]. Berlin: Mouton/deGruyter (Trends in Linguistics: Studies and Monographs 55). 1991.

Even without direct collaboration (all meaning-making in a community is social and interactive, dialogic, in many important ways), the process of extended coherent human semiotic activity, for which, at least retrospectively, we can establish a unity and coherence of "purpose", is more like developmental processes in self-organizing systems than it is like the "goal-directed" or "goal-seeking" operations of cybernetic, machine-like systems. In particular, "goals" can only be defined locally or momentarily, and it is precisely *\*retrospectively\** that WE, as observers or readers, construct a continuity and coherence of overall, or global goals.

It is a defining characteristic of self-organizing systems that their activity at one moment changes the conditions that define their possible goals at the next moment. In human behavior, it is only AFTER some culturally recognized unit of activity has been "completed" that we can convince ourselves (delude ourselves?) that all elements of the activity can be unified as subserving some single overall goal. DURING the course of activity, from the dynamic-, participant- perspective (vs. the synoptic-, observer- perspective; cf. Bourdieu in the *\_Logic of Practice\_*), we cannot know how the activity will turn out. We falsify much of the nature of human behavior if we neglect its *\*contingent\** nature during activity for participants, and supersede this with our synoptic view in which it appears more determinate or teleonomic.

Balancing these two perspectives, creating a productive dialectic between them which models the dynamic aspects of behavior, presents a challenge to such fundamental assumptions of modernist science as the possibility of stable representations and faithful theories. I no longer believe that self-organizing systems can be modeled in the traditional sense. I believe that the best we can do is to create OTHER self-organizing, dynamical systems (e.g. in our brains and bodies, in our interactions with artifacts like computers as they run "simulations", etc.) as tools to help us interact more thoughtfully with such systems (e.g. ecosystems, human communities, ongoing "projects" of human activity).

Activity Theory, following Leontiev, has recognized several levels of "goals" for operations, actions, activity, and views such as those articulated by Raelin, Lang, Engeström, and others seem to me to shed from the notion of "goal" both its exclusive Cartesian locus in human intentionality and its fixity, making it an aspect of interactivity itself. I would be interested to know how people's current theoretical

models attempt to handle the meta-stability of goals, their contingency during activity, and the very common phenomenon that people seem to set out to do one thing and wind up deciding that they have actually done another which could not have been foreseen or even imagined until they interacted with some of the consequences of pursuing their initial project.

The notion of "strategy", by foregrounding systems of pathways, or potential and actual trajectories of activity, is more flexible than that of "goal", but how can we understand strategies when goals are NOT fixed? or when goals are as dependent on strategies (over time; \*making\* "time") as strategies on goals?

JAY.

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### **13.3. Date: Sat, 30 Oct 93 18:39:11 -0700**

From: ematusov@cats.ucsc.edu

Subject: re-When is a strategy

To: xclass

I want add a few words to Jay Lemke's remarks about the notion of goal. Jay presented a dichotomy of goal as description vs. goal as guidance. I think the solution of this dichotomy is in a flexible and emergent nature of goals. Leont'ev (1981) found an interesting Hegel's insight about the development of goal:

>As Hegel correctly noted, an individual "cannot define the goal

>of his action until he has acted...." (p. 62)

The paradox of activity is that it is directed by goal that emerges in it!

Eugene Matusov

University of California at Santa Cruz

### **13.4. Date: Sat, 30 Oct 1993 21:51:35 -0500 (EST)**

From: GORD\_WELLS@OISE.ON.CA

Subject: Re: Stable and emergent goals

To: xclass

Jay's remarks about the instability of goals certainly resonates with my experience of attempting to analyze episodes of classroom discourse:

<In particular, "goals" can only be defined locally or momentarily, and it is precisely \*retrospectively\* that WE, as observers or readers, construct a continuity and coherence of overall, or global goals.>>

I'd like to offer a few further comments.

1. The extent to which the discourse seems to be organized by a goal to which all participants orient throughout varies according to such matters as:

a) the extent of asymmetry of status: teacher-directed discourse is more likely to be kept focused on the predetermined goal than exploratory discussion, in which the teacher encourages student initiative and alternative viewpoints. (Of course, there is no knowing whether those who are not actively participating are oriented to the 'official' goal or not.) Other things being equal, small-group discussion, in which there is no recognized leader, is more likely to be organized in terms of 'emergent' rather than 'stable' goals.

b) whether the goal has been overtly stated or explicitly negotiated: where either of these conditions is met, there is a greater chance of the ensuing activity and discourse being oriented to the stated goal. This seems to be true for small groups of students who are tackling an agreed-upon problem as well as for teacher-directed discussion.

c) the level at which one looks for evidence of goal-directedness. If, for the purposes of argument, one posits three levels: sequence (i.e. nuclear exchange and any exchanges dependent on it), episode, and task, it seems that goal-orientation is most apparent at the level of sequence and task. At the sequence level, the goal proposed in the initiating move of the nuclear exchange is fairly likely to be oriented to until it has been achieved (e.g. questions are fairly likely to receive answers, though there may also be further moves in which the answer is acknowledged, evaluated or extended through some comment). At the episode level, on the other hand, possibilities inherent in the first sequence may be so attractive that they are taken up in the following sequence, and so on, so that within an episode it may be difficult to see any single goal that is being oriented to. However, where there is a superordinate task, with a stated or negotiated goal, it is likely that, sooner or later, one of the participants will make some sort of 'topic shift' to bring the talk back 'on task', so that, when one looks at the talk at the level of task, there is evidence that there has been goal-orientation throughout, though with varying degrees of effect on the immediate co-construction of the talk. This applies to both whole class and small group discourse, I think.

These comments notwithstanding, I agree with Jay when he states:



<It is a defining characteristic of self-organizing systems that their activity at one moment changes the conditions that define their possible goals at the next moment. In human behavior, it is only AFTER some culturally recognized unit of activity has been "completed" that we can convince ourselves (delude ourselves?) that all elements of the activity can be unified as subserving some single overall goal. DURING the course of activity, from the dynamic-, participant- perspective (vs. the synoptic-, observer- perspective; cf. Bourdieu in the *\_Logic of Practice\_*), we cannot know how the activity will turn out.>>

2. From a teacher's perspective, however, there are many good reasons for wanting to try to keep the group 'on task'. A question worth exploring further, therefore, is what strategies can s/he use to achieve this goal without controlling both the form and content of students' participation by means of the 'recitation script'? If the teacher does not make the goal explicit at the outset, will students be able to orient to it - assuming that they are willing to try to do so? This raises another interesting question: how do we orient to the goal currently 'in play' when it has not been explicitly stated?

### **13.5. Date: Sun, 31 Oct 93 21:47:41 EST**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.BITNET>  
Subject: Goals and tasks  
To: Classroom Studies Group <XCLASS@UCSD.BitNet>

"Staying on task" seems meaningless to me insofar as what is "on task" is determined by the participants. For then it will surely change and be continually redefined, as it is, say for us as we do our research, or even as we write an essay. We are never "off task" when it is we who decide what the current task is. It is only, as Gordon Wells points out, when there is a power relationship at work that defines the task from outside the activity, i.e. is someone else's task from the viewpoint of the participants, that this notion makes sense. (This logic by the way would argue that teachers and students are never quite doing the same task, are never fully co-participants in a task, so long as only the teacher decides what the task is.)

What evidence do we actually have that children learn better, especially that they learn better how to work on their own tasks, or the tasks of groups which formulate their own tasks, when they are taught by methods that work to keep them "on" a task which is not theirs?

I would think that what such methods do is to prepare people to do the tasks set them by others. Obviously we live in a society in which much labor is performed under such conditions, but one could certainly argue along these same lines that this is grossly socially inefficient: that the community as a whole would get much more productive work done if people's tasks emerged out of needs and current activities, rather than if they were externally assigned and coerced as they normally are in our economy of labor. This inefficient system (justified by a considerable

edifice of ideological beliefs -- check 'em out!) seems only to benefit the task-assigners, who are thus in a position to command others' labor for their ends. How could such an arrangement possibly be even quasi-stable without the use of coercive force?

JAY.

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### **13.6. Date: Tue, 02 Nov 1993 11:59:36 -0500 (EST)**

From: GORD\_WELLS@OISE.ON.CA

Subject: Re: Stable and emergent goals

To: xclass@ucsd.edu

Warning: This message is 133 lines in length. Delete, if not interested.

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Continuing the discussion on stable or emergent goals, Jay Lemke writes:

<<"Staying on task" seems meaningless to me insofar as what is "on task" is determined by the participants. For then it will surely change and be continually redefined, as it is, say for us as we do our research, or even as we write an essay. We are never "off task" when it is we who decide what the current task is.>>

This seems to me to be too sweeping a statement. Followed through, as it was in Jay's message:

<<What evidence do we actually have that children learn better, especially that they learn better how to work on their own tasks, or the tasks of groups which formulate their own tasks, when they are taught by methods that work to keep them "on" a task which is not theirs?>>

it also seems to deny the value of any form of teacher organized activity.

In this context I think it may be helpful to invoke Leontiev's distinction between action and operation. Setting a goal for action, e.g. to replace the storm windows in one's house before winter, or to write a message to this network on the value of establishing and working towards stable goals in a classroom activity, does not predetermine in advance the sub-goals of the constituent tasks, nor the operations by means of which these goals will be achieved. These are responsive to the proposals of the participants and to the exigencies of the situation, as these emerge in working towards the achievement of the superordinate goal.

I may find that the type of storm windows I am replacing is now obsolete and that all available models are marginally different in size, which requires me to enlarge or fill part of the window opening before inserting the new windows. This, in turn may involve me in discussion with a friend who has had a similar problem, from which I devise a new plan for tackling the job, which involves task goals that I had not initially envisaged. But I am still oriented to my action goal - namely to have well-fitting storm windows in place before the first snowstorms.

Similarly, as in a class I recently observed, a teacher may state the overall goal for a curriculum unit: to learn about electrical circuits and for groups of students to design and make a working model that employs such a circuit, and for the whole class to present their models and explanatory texts in a science fair for the other students in the school. Within this overall goal, the teacher encourage self-selected groups of students to choose a model they would be interested in making and to plan how they will proceed. Inevitably, some groups change their minds about what they want to make, and all groups have to revise their action plans as they discover that they do not work as anticipated: available operations have to be modified, or new ones learned (which is, of course, one of the teacher's goals for the curriculum unit).

Within this activity setting, there are both stable and emergent goals. The overall goal, proposed by the teacher and accepted by the students - for groups of students to make working models for the science fair - remains stable. It continues to provide the orienting context for the groups as they collaborate in actually making models that satisfy the teacher's criterion of including an electrical circuit and their own emerging criteria of function and design. At these levels of constituent tasks and operations, the goals are emergent and dynamic.

The issue on which there may be disagreement arises when, for example, one group runs into difficulties that they are unable to overcome and they start working towards a goal that is not related to the superordinate goal. In these circumstances, it seems to me, the appropriate response by the teacher is to engage with them as a more expert participant and to provide sufficient assistance to get them back 'on task', so that they are able to achieve the overall goal that had been agreed on. In the process, the teacher and students together will develop and modify emergent goals as the construction proceeds, just as the other groups are doing.

There are at least two good reasons for taking this line: first, in completing the task with assistance, the students will have an opportunity to learn about the relevant circuit, as this artifact is used in practice in their chosen model. This is one of the teacher's goals for the unit; it is also a goal that the teacher wants the students to take on as their own. The second reason is that the teacher wants the students to develop the disposition as well as the knowledge and skills to formulate and find solutions to problems that arise as they try to achieve superordinate action goals.

Under these conditions, a degree of `pressure' to continue working at the task is, in my view, part of the assistance that the teacher gives.

(A more difficult case would be where a group is following a discovery they've made which leads them to set an interesting and worthwhile goal, but one which does not contribute to the overall goal. Here the teacher has to make a value judgment about whose goal should take precedence, but that judgment must also take into account the likely consequences for the established patterns of work within the classroom community as a whole.)

My general point would be that it is not only on the dimension of power that students and teacher differ. It is the teacher's responsibility, by virtue of her/his greater expertise (mastery of the cultural practices and artifacts valued by the community) to create conditions under which the students may appropriate these resources and have opportunities to externalize them by using them in creative ways in novel problem situations. This is the activity of Education in which the teacher is engaged and it provides the teacher's superordinate goal. At the same time, it is also one of her/his goals is to have the students take over this goal and make it their own. To this end, the teacher (guided by curriculum guidelines, etc.) selects curricular activities that in her/his view, given knowledge about the particular group of students, are likely to provide appropriate interesting and challenging opportunities for learning. Provided the teacher's judgment about these activities is correct (i.e. matched to the interests and current capabilities of the majority of students in the class), it seems to me to be appropriate to establish the goals of such activities as stable, whilst allowing - and indeed encouraging - students to work towards goals that are emergent with respect to the tasks and operations required to achieve the superordinate activity goal. It is by organizing and assisting the students' participation in the activity of education, as enacted in such curriculum activities, and by creating occasions for the class to reflect on the processes involved - it seems to me - that the teacher can best enable individual students to become agents and goal- setters at the highest level - that is, of determining their own learning. If this involves the exercise of power, it does not seem to me to be malevolent.

Of course, it all depends on how this rather abstract scenario is played out in practice. Hence the questions at the end of my previous message:

<<A question worth exploring further, therefore, is what strategies can [the teacher] use to achieve this goal without controlling both the form and content of students' participation by means of the `recitation script'? If the teacher does not make the goal explicit at the outset, will students be able to orient to it - assuming that they are willing to try to do so?>>

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### **13.7. Date: Wed, 03 Nov 1993 17:53:07 MET**

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From: Alfred Lang (Univ. Bern) <LANG@psy.unibe.ch>  
Subject: Notions of goal and strategy etc.  
To: xact@psy.unibe.ch CC: LANG@psy.unibe.ch, xclass@psy.unibe.ch

Can we replace the notion of goal by some notion of strategy?

(Sorry, if you receive this message twice. It responds to messages by Ellice Forman and Jay Lemke sent to XACT and messages by Eugene Matusow and Gordon Wells received via XCLASS

Jay Lemke has stated his strong reservations about the adequateness of presentday goal conceptions in accounting for the behavior of open systems. I would like to amplify him and also to turn attention away from, as it seems to me, peripheral aspects of the problem such as at what moments in the course of things they emerge (which Gordon Wells seems to dwell upon) which are leading to the paradoxical notion of goals supposed to direct activity, but emerging only after the course of activity (as Eugene Matusow has pointed out, following Hegel himself). You know the story of the clever lady who, queried for her meaning about something, asked back: how can I know my meaning before having voiced it?

The question of goals, it seems to me, is meaningless until particularized by the kind of manifestation a goal is to emerge? Like most notions of needs, goals are nothing but tautologies used to name collectively the entities they are alleged to explain. As a side effect they forbear further inquiry. I tend to question even any descriptive value of such concepts as long as we have no concrete definition thereof which avoids such nominalistic pitfalls.

Let me therefore ask the more methodological question of whether goals or strategies or similar concepts are supposed to be entities existing independent of the activities they are to account for, or whether they are supposed to be no more than a particular character of the activity itself. Naturally, only in the former case can we expect them to have any explanatory value, while in the latter the notion should guide us to describe that character and specify its position in the activities so characterizable before prejudicing its functionality.

As a guide towards a possible answer I may quote a passage from a letter sent on December 2nd 1780 by Georg Christoph Lichtenberg from Goettingen University to

his friend Jean Andre De Luc (a French theologian in the service of some ladies at British court):

-----quote from Lichtenberg, original in English----

Which of both do You think is acting more philosophically: to suppose, that matter, of whose existence we are at least convinced, though it is probable we do not know one thousandth part of its properties, may also be possesse'd of thought; or to invent an entirely new class of beings, \_merely because we\_, we cannot conceive, how matter should be possessed of thought. In the former supposition, we have but a *qualitas occulta* [i.e. a hidden character or quality] to be reconciled with, but in the latter we have to struggle with an *ens occultum cum qualitatibus occultis* [i.e. a hidden essence with hidden character or qualities]. That such limited creatures as we, should suppose qualities unknown in a thing known, is but just, but to create new beings philosophy has no right, particularly as it is only the difficulty of the question here, which induces philosophers to do it. It has always appeared to me an odd way of reasoning, because we find it impossible to account for thought from the known qualities of matter, to suppose another being of our making and perhaps not a bit more comprehensible, but which has the property of thinking, and to be sure must have it, because we suppose it. This is not untying the knot but cutting it [...]

-----endquote-----

That principality stated, I would maintain that it pertains almost equally to notions of goal and of strategy. This is another case of the distinction between nominalistic and realistic thought; or another proof of the enormous power of words in our enlightened age.

But perhaps a consideration of how a strategy operates in cooperative activity might advance us. Indeed, the strategist, the commander in chief on the battlefield, to unty the metaphor, has to explain to his sub-chiefs, and they to theirs etc., how he sees the situation and what he expects them to do under what conditions. So, this communication succeeding, all involved share a lot of how to see the circumstances and what and how to do it in that situation. No wonder then that their activities will display some common directionality and by implication, supposedly, they all desire to win the battle. Of you want to call that their goal, so what? Do not the their ennemy commanders have the same goal yet act quite otherwise?

Transferring that to one-person activities we might construe of some distributed process of bringing a set of internal and external resources and constraints to bear upon the emergence of the actually pertinent internal and external structures that govern a course of action. By structures I mean a distinguished set of dynamic mind-brain states as well as particular arrangements of the environment, given, selected or brought about.



negotiation and recognition and falling into the expectations of type we do help each other keep on task. Consider the way the interaction of general expectations of seminar activities, theoretical discussions, emergent patterns of net discussions, the locally emergent typifications of xfamily discussions withing activity theory type issues, guided by identified topics (in part oriented to through headlines, but also negotiated and held flexibly stable by other features), and many other typifying elements help us define a mutually useful task here and keep us on task, at least for a while.

Chuck Bazerman  
Chuck Bazerman  
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### **13.9. Date: Thu, 4 Nov 1993 11:52:34 +0100 (MET)**

From: raeithel@rzdspc1.informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)  
Subject: Goals are Symbols  
To: xact@ucsd.edu, xclass@ucsd.edu  
Cc: slongo@psy.unibe.ch (Daniel Slongo), floyd@rzdspc1.informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Christiane Floyd), zuelligh@rzdspc1.informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Heinz Zuellighoven), dahme%hp832.uucp@hpc.com.rz.hu-berlin.de (Christian Dahme)

Like Alfred Lang in his last message on the notions of goal and strategy I want to first apologize for sending this twice, to XACT, and to XCLASS as well. Of the discussion unfolding in XCLASS I saw only Jay Lemke's and Alfred's notes, because I have chosen to not receive this stream. --- When I read Jay's sketch of the discussion I am nearly regretting this decision...

Both Jay and Alfred argue forcefully for deconstruction of the idea that humans use "goals as mental entities" as this is presently understood in mainstream psychology, education, and elsewhere. All of these arguments seem sound and convincing to me, yet I am not willing to give up the word "goal" (or "aim", or "purpose", or "motive") just because the main stream is using them differently from everyday talk.

Let me explain with less flaming, using an image of a concrete case.

A goal in soccer (European football) is a frame in front of which the goal-keeper is hopping to and fro, being super-active with regard to the unfolding joint motion of the enemy team, and the counteracting motion of his own team. He is not only tracking the ball's movements between players and through the air, rather he tries to guess the strategy of the other team, knowing the general ways of each enemy player, and also the range of strategies the enemy coach is known to be using (his



own coach has spent many hours analyzing these, showing them to his team on video -- it is a big game, with big money for the successful).

It is also common to say that the goal of the players in this kind of football is to fool the goal-keeper into letting the ball through the frame where it will be cushioned by the net. This is said to be a goal, too, and it scores one point.

The goal of soccer players is to *\*make\** this kind of goal.

The goal of the goal-keeper is to not let this goal be made.

The two goals-as-frames of the two teams are not the same, obviously.

The goals-as-intentions of the players may be said to be identical in type, but they are *\*directed differently\** anyway, to one or the other frame at opposing ends of the playing field. (Likewise, Alfred's argument of the goal being the same in warfare for both camps cannot do the work of convincing us of uselessness of this term; it is obviously different if "we" win or "they" do so).

In soccer, there are, consequently, two contrasting readiesses for action with regard to the goals-as-frames:

Own goal: prevent ball coming even near.

Opponent's goal: fool the defenders and make the goal-as-score-point.

The soccer goal-as-frame is a permanent *\*sign\** for what counts as a point, what is legitimately *\*aimed for\** by the teams, and it is also the "decision machine" which "says" that the point is made by the ball passing through it. (There are arbiters and video playbacks in case it is unclear what the frame "said").

What I did above may be said to be mere play with words, possible only by the happenstance that the wooden or iron frame in soccer has the same name as an imputed mental entity in the head of the players. This is not so. There are more examples, and you can read them here, if you stay with me for another 60 lines...

(1)

The aim of archers is to aim and hit the aim.

German: Das Ziel des Bogenschuetzen ist es, zu zielen und das Ziel zu treffen.

(2)

German: Der Zweck des Bogenschiessens ist es, den Zweck zu treffen.

The purpose of archery is to hit the target.

// The German word Zweck was originally a word for the bulls-eye of the archer's target. It is still with us in the form of Heftzwecke, i.e., a thumb tack //

(3)

German: Die Absicht des Boersenhaendler ist es, Profit zu machen.  
The intention of the broker is to make profit.

// The German word Absicht means literally "view-at" or "view-directed-to", thus a translation that keeps the metaphor would be: The broker acts with a view at making profit //

We now have three different additional names for goals:

(1) Aim as an external object for making a hit that counts, like the goal-as-frame; clearly a symbolic object. In German and English it is customary to use it also for the conscious readiness of the actor to "make the hit" in any way possible. -- An object and a subjective state.

(2) Purpose as a name used from a de-centred position to describe the sense in which the action of an observed person is considered to be having sense. In German the object name has been forgotten, Zweck is for most speakers the word to use, if purpose has to be described.

(3) Intention as a name used only for the mental state of holding an aim, having a purpose. English often uses terms of Latin origin for abstract or mental entities. Speakers without knowledge of Latin might never know that "intention" is related to "tension", and means "the state of stretching oneself for..." (see the Concise Oxford Dict. or any other lexicon that carries etymologies).

To sum up: External symbolic objects seem to be the origins of the concepts used for the directedness of human action. This is not mere chance, because without "holding" those symbols as a reminder of the direction, actors would seem aimless, or as if being driven only by their situatedness in the larger community of practice.

I have understood Vygotsky as explaining that such symbols are "tools of the actor's will" in the most literal sense possible. In the days of the Gulf War, Mike Cole has reminded the XFAMILY that it takes some religious or nationalistic symbols to hold, and go into the murderous battle.

Medieval armies, whether European, Japanese or whatever, are known to have carried symbolic devices that show where "we" are, where "they" are, and in their intermingling also, how the whole tragedy unfolds.

Goals are symbols that are "held up" as reminders of future states that self wants to establish.

How about this definition, Jay and Alfred ?

Arne.

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### **13.10. Date: Thu, 04 Nov 1993 21:18:40 MET**

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From: Alfred Lang (Univ. Bern) <LANG@psy.unibe.ch>  
Subject: Goal notions  
To: xact@psy.unibe.ch

I have to be very brief for lack of time and because of computer problems. I, of course, never wanted to deny that people experience goals they have decided for to determine their acting. What I wanted to argue is that such notions have no explanatory value. All along real entities must exist within and around living beings (humans included) that are parts of dynamic structures (that stretch over living systems, individuals or groups, and their environment, including culture) of which it is an important effect to give a lot of what is happening directionality. That is, I try to plea for a structural definition of the directedness of acting rather than the substantive implied in most goal notions used today. And, on a methodo- logical level, I suspect what people can tell about these structures (i.e. what they, in our culture, call their chosen goals) is not sufficiently connected to those structures and mainly after the fact or too global to do any service than mislead our scientific attention.

Alfred E-mail on Internet: lang@psy.unibe.ch

[next AL message](#)

### **13.11. Date: Thu, 04 Nov 1993 12:20:50 -0500 (CDT)**

From: "David R. Russell" <S1DRR@ISUVAX.IASTATE.EDU>  
Subject: Re: Goals as symbols  
To: xact@ucsd.edu

Like Arne Raeithel, I am not on XCLASS, but I find the discussion of goals going on now very useful for activity theory.

Looking at goals as "symbols that are "held up" as reminders of future states that self wants to establish" seems to be a way to get over the problem of defining goals as "interior" intentional states. However, any activity that involves many people will have a whole range of symbols involved in it.

To develop the soccer example: The goals are goals, of course. But if one asks a fan or critic of soccer what the goal of soccer is, one might find a whole range of artifacts pointed to, stadiums, pubs, rule books, even national flags, as sports in modern nation states often have a powerful nationalist ideology invoked as their ultimate goal.

Applying some tools of semiotic analysis to these pointings may tell us a great deal about how activities work.

Run it up the flagpole and see who salutes it (to end with A Raeithel's military metaphor also).

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### **13.12. Date: Thu, 04 Nov 1993 18:46:39 -0500 (EST)**

From: GORD\_WELLS@OISE.ON.CA  
Subject: Goals and `real entities'  
To: xact@ucsd.edu, xclass@ucsd.edu,

In his latest contribution to the discussion of the status of `goals', Alfred Lang writes:

<<I, of course, never wanted to deny that people experience goals they have decided for to determine their acting. What I wanted to argue is that such notions have no explanatory value. All along real entities must exist within and around living beings (humans included) that are parts of dynamic structures (that stretch over living systems, individuals or groups, and their environment, including culture) of which it is an important effect to give a lot of what is happening directionality.>>

Picking up Arne's earlier response, can't we allow that the goalposts in a game of soccer are `real entities', as is the target at which the archer aims? And isn't getting the ball between the posts or the arrow into the target the goal of the activity in a very `real' sense?

Adopting a developmental perspective, many of the activities in which children develop complex goal-oriented behaviour have a real entity as their object, for

example the cake that the child helps the mother to bake, or the picture-matching puzzle that the parent helps the child to complete.

From there, it is not such a big step to activities the goal of which is the creation of a symbolic object, such as a drawing, a story or a science report. As many teachers have noted, many of the most productive learning activities in the classroom are those that have a 'real' symbolic product as their object/goal.

However, as I noted in a previous message, this does not mean that all the sub-goals to be attained as means to the achievement of the superordinate goal have to be fixed in advance, as in an algorithm. These are emergent, in the sense of being responsive to the participant(s)' assessment of the current situation in the light of the superordinate goal, and to the mediational means that are available in the situation. Nor is it necessary, it seems to me, for the goals and sub-goals to be explicitly formulated on any particular occasion for them to be effective in directing behaviour. Here, Chuck Bazerman's point about genres of action - or activity-types - is helpful, since the cultural practices in which these genres are deployed already have 'built-in' goals.

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### **13.13. Date: Thu, 4 Nov 1993 10:52:44 -0800**

From: nardi@taurus.apple.com (Bonnie Nardi)

Subject: goals

To: xact@ucsd.edu

I have followed the discussion of goals with great interest and have been struggling with trying to understand this concept myself.

I think Arne's point that we should not give up on a notion of motive or objective is correct. It is quite odd to me that it is being argued, as a general position, that "goals can only be defined locally or momentarily... retrospectively" (Jay Lemke). Of course sometimes we do paper over the past, and redefine experience, but it is also true that human beings are tenacious, persistent, driven goal seekers. We do not execute "plans" as though they were algorithms, but we do keep an object in mind and may spend years trying to achieve it. People do amazing, even heroic things in pursuit of goals and dreams: getting through medical school, having a baby in the face of infertility, escaping from a repressive government, helping others to escape repression, as well as the more mundane everyday experiences

of feeding the children when there is little money, learning to play the piano, saving up enough money to visit relatives in another country, etc., etc. None of these behaviors is comprehensible without some strong notion of object in the activity theory sense.

To fail to recognize the reality of human motivation may be dangerous. Motivation and will afford people tremendous power. I think it important to try to understand what motivates people rather than to assert that they simply react to "a situation" and then make up some reasons for having done so later.

I found Arne's notion of the "external symbolic objects [that] seem to be the origins of the concept [of goal] used for the directness of human action" to be very apt.

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**13.14. Date: Fri, 5 Nov 1993 09:20:09 -0500 (EST)**

From: Jozsef A Toth <jtoth+@pitt.edu>  
Subject: Re: goals  
To: xact@ucsd.edu, nardi@taurus.apple.com (Bonnie Nardi)

Regarding goals, however, no matter how one chooses to characterize a goal, what is it that draws an organism (in an activity-based sense) towards a goal or away from a goal? Predators, prey, shelter, mate and so forth provide such mediatory mechanisms for animals. I don't understand the term "symbolic" (arne) in this context however. If an external entity is perceived by the organism, where is the symbolism? Moreover, if the external entity is internalized and reflected upon in absence of the original stimulus, say as an image, then is the internalization only a re-representation or an analog of the external "symbol". If the term "symbol" is simply used for matters of convenience, I'll buy that--but why not "semiotic device", for which the definition takes in the term "symbol", among other things.

For me, Lewin's field theory is a neat way to look at the attraction/repulsion, in a valence-oriented way, that occurs between an organism and its surrounding mediatory mechanisms.

joe  
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**13.15. Date: Fri, 5 Nov 1993 22:16:08 +0100 (MET)**

From: raeithel@rzdspc1.informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)  
Subject: Re: goals  
To: jtoth+@pitt.edu (Jozsef A Toth), Cc: xact@ucsd.edu, nardi@taurus.apple.com

Joe:

I am using "symbol" because I believe that animals do not pursue goals in the same sense as we do. One criterion for this is that we are able to answer the question: "What are you up to?" with a discursive model of the state-of-our-lifeworld that would correspond to "reaching the goal".

Furthermore, I believe (that is: I proceed from the assumption) that this symbolizing ability of human animals is the only ground we have for arguing for the causal power of goals. Alfred Lang thinks otherwise, it appears, he wants to dissolve the seeming unity and definiteness of "goal", and to substitute an array of semiotic objects (icons, indices, and symbols) in order to be able to describe human action more realistically.

Accordingly, it would go way outside my intended domain of application to make a general theory of animal "goal directed behavior" out of my statement in "goals are symbols". Like the Russian colleague I believe that humans are less "external" than the other animals.

But this is not to say that animals do not produce and take up symbols on their own scale of semiosis. I think -- proceeding from Leontyev's "macrostructure" hypothesis -- that humans have expanded the level of actions vastly in comparison with -- let's say -- mountain gorillas, while the activity level and the operation level expansion is not as great -- PROVIDED WE LOOK ONLY AT THE SCOPE THAT A PERSON CAN MASTER. Taken over whole societies, activities and operations are, of course, also vastly more different than in any animal "society".

If one wants to build a theory for animals without full-blown symbolic media, too, it would be surely wise to talk about "semiotic devices" only, as you say.

Then you add:

> For me, Lewin's field theory is a neat way to look at the

> attraction/repulsion, in a valence-oriented way, that occurs between an

> organism and its surrounding mediatory mechanisms.

This is where Alfred wants to expand, as I understand him. And I am totally sympathetic with this possibility.

I just wanted to point to the thesis that goals may be non-existent except as symbols...

Arne.

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### **13.16. Date: Fri, 5 Nov 93 15:48:52 -0800**

From: ematusov@cats.UCSC.EDU  
Subject: re- Goals and Strategies  
To: xact@ucsd.edu, xclass@ucsd.edu

In Alfred Lang's very interesting and provocative attempt to substitute the concept of "goal" in activity with the concept of "strategy," I found two different approaches behind the discussion. One approach, I would call "technological" or "instrumental", is interested in the question of HOW participants act. It focuses on problem solving processes. The other approach, I would call "interpretative," is interested in question of WHAT participants try to accomplish. It focuses on goal emerging and goal negotiation processes. I don't think that these two approaches are mutually exclusive. Unfortunately, up to now, "technological" approach is overwhelmingly dominant in psychology. "The construction zone" by Newman, Griffin, & Cole is a wonderful example of the other, "goal-oriented," approach in studying joint activity.

I, myself, feel much more potentials in the latter approach because goal development rooted in communication (not only verbal). Social nature of activity manifests primarily in goal negotiation and only secondary in using sociocultural tools (in a broader sense including strategies).

Eugene Matusov  
University of California at Santa Cruz

### **13.17. Date: Sat, 6 Nov 1993 12:56:25 +0100 (MET)**

From: raeithel@rzdspc1.informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)  
Subject: Goals and Zo-peds  
To: xact@ucsd.edu

Goals exist because people use these words to direct their course of action.



Goals are discursive inscriptions on the inside of the Zones of Proximal Development, written or spoken (aloud or in private silent self-talk), to be taken up again later, with a view to ensure the directedness of own effort, even in the face of impossibility of the original formulation.

The ten commandments are goals. There are precursors in graphic symbols, and in mimetic re-enactments of a human or totem figuration from the past.

It is really very simple.

Have a good weekend, you all, while the CHAT class is busy preparing for Monday !

Cheers from Arne.

### **13.18. Date: Sat, 6 Nov 1993 10:51:15 -0800**

From: Yrjo Engestrom <yengestr>  
Subject: Re: Goals and Zo-peds  
To: xact-request@weber.ucsd.edu, xact@ucsd.edu

Arne's notion of goals as 'discursive inscriptions on the inside of the zones of proximal development, written or spoken' is very appropriate, I] think. Perhaps 'written or spoken' could be extended to include other possible forms of representation?

More importantly, I don't think the ten commandments are goals. For me, they are examples of rules which perhaps originally were meant to be visionary symbols, or 'tertiary artifacts' in Wartofsky's sense.

Yrjo Engestrom

LCHC at UCSD

### **13.19. Date: Sat, 06 Nov 93 18:51:40 EST**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@cunyvm.bitnet>  
Subject: Goals and strategies  
To: Classroom Studies Group <XCLASS@UCSD.BitNet>

Goals and strategies.

Responding to the thread of this discussion lately, I find that while I am in general agreement with Gordon Wells' formulation of the issues, I suspect we are still somewhat neglecting how power and conflict intervene in matters of determining what "the task" is

and who benefits, by whose criteria, from whose being "on task".

I was also very interested in Gordon's, and also Eugene Matusov's application of the AT (or similar) hierarchies to these issues. I believe we can learn a great deal about just *how* we culturally construct (i.e. reconstruct, retroactively) "goals" and particularly the relations of lower-level to higher-level ones, by using such hierarchical modes of analysis.

As to the suggestion that people somehow adapt to imposed tasks without the need for coercive force to stabilize the system, I have to wonder just WHY they do so? if they would obviously prefer NOT to, then what happens if they DON'T? In all the cases I can think of, there is something very nasty and material in the way of pain at the end of the socially imposed chain of consequences for non-compliance. Resistance is not victory.

Gordon Wells has amplified his position at some length, and while it seems in many ways eminently reasonable, I am going to challenge some of its fundamental assumptions. I do this mainly to foreground some of the issues that lie behind these assumptions -- ones that probably we all make from time to time, and which may be useful in some circumstances, but which I believe have serious limitations as well.

My position on goals, already stated, is that their "stability" is an artifact of our (ongoing) retrospective construction of some set of prior activities as all subsumable under the "same" ('superordinate') goal. What I think we often tend to overlook are all the instances in which that goal is constructed as having *changed* (or been abandoned) rather than as having remained the same. It is not clearly the case that stable goals are the normal case and emergent ones the exception. Gordon's observation (cf. hierarchical analysis) that it is most often the highest level goals that appear to remain the same, can also be interpreted as meaning that it is only at the highest level of abstraction, where the connections to specific actions are least definite and where we have the most discursive flexibility, that we are most often successful in convincing ourselves of the stability of a goal.

But the more serious issue here for me is the power issue, and the associated means-ends argument. In Gordon's classroom examples, it is always the teacher who sets highest level goals, who maintains their stability, and who decides when it is appropriate for a goal, at any level, to be changed or an activity to be counted as "on task" for her original goal. The power asymmetry could not be more obvious here. Goal emergence in this picture is *not* a property of the self-organizing group apart from this power relationship.

Gordon's values argument for the goodness of this model clearly recognizes its cultural reproductive intent: he mentions not only the use of cultural resources in which the teacher is expert, but the inculcating of a specific disposition, which seems to me to include the specifically middle-class one of sticking to goals, or persevering in the face of obstacles (Rule 1: Keep your highest level goals stable), and perhaps also, given the essential role of the power relation, a

specifically non-ruling class fraction disposition: Rule 2, Believe that your Betters can better select Highest Level goals.

As someone whose dispositions probably accord more closely in this respect with ruling class ones, I would regard neither of these rules as good general strategies for \*me\*, and while they are certainly functional in the existing social order as general strategies for those positioned as I have indicated, they are perhaps just a little \*too\* functional in that respect (says my rebellious disinclination to favor the reproduction of that social order).

Now, if we did favor inculcating these dispositions, then teacher "pressure" would seem to be not merely an "assistance" in doing so, but a necessity. However, even this is not the most troubling issue for me.

Gordon's whole argument leads up to a final justificatory claim on the terrain of values we share: that the "pressure to stay on task" approach, rooted as it is in the ultimately coercive power of teachers over students (and generally of adults over children in the process of the reproduction of a social order which favors the interests of the former over those of the latter, along with a lot of other systematic injustices), ...

"can best enable individual students to become agents and goal-setters at the highest level - that is, of determining their own learning."

No, I don't believe it can. For it is the basic principle of this approach that it is precisely at this highest level that we do \*not\* in fact give students practice at determining their own goals, their own learning. We deny them control over their own lives at this level on the grounds that this is the best preparation for taking control of their own lives at this level.

What I believe we are doing, in fact, is preparing them to serve the interests of others. We are crippling them (if only to the small extent that we succeed) in their ability to define their own interests, their own problems, their own goals and strategies, and training them to be very effective at identifying and pursuing instrumental subgoals in the service of externally defined, maintained, and imposed tasks.

What has been the experience of those of you associated with programs in which learners are relatively more free to define their own highest level activities? How free? how high? what surprises?

JAY.

JAY LEMKE.

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**13.20. Date: Sat, 06 Nov 93 18:52:38 EST**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@cunyvm.bitnet>  
Subject: Goals and discourses  
To: Activity Theory Group <XACT@UCSD.BitNet>

Alfred Lang has posted very eloquently on alternatives to the goal-and-strategy metaphor about human action. He reminds us particularly, with his example of generals on the battlefield, just how beholden this metaphor (really a sort of discourse frame, a semantic scaffolding transposed from another discourse formation altogether, or now shared by several such) is to military (thence to athletic and corporate) discourse.

In all these cybernetic (flow of control) models, power hierarchies among individuals of different social ranks (general officers to cannonfodder, owners/managers/coaches to players, Boards/CEOs to laborers, curriculum-dictators to teachers to students) generates a model of HIGHER goals (read: interests?) subordinating LOWER ones as power constrains action from above.

Our ancient mentalist discourses, still with us in residue, reproduced the social hierarchy internally (in ancient India no less than in classical, medieval, and early modern Europe), so that there was a HIGHER nature or faculty (for us the Rational, i.e. upper-middle class) setting goals to be carried out or constraints to control or entrain the functioning LOWER (e.g. instrumental, technical, bodily-emotional) nature and faculties. Cognitive science is deeply wedded to this notion of hierarchical functioning, not least because of the basic master-slave model of the relation between programmer and computer (another cultural fantasy expressing the overall hierarchization of the social order as seen -- again partly in a fantasy of desire -- from the dominant subculture's viewpoint).

I have recently been reading some critiques of Habermas' proposals that we can separate communicative (good) rationality from instrumental (bad) rationality. The homology with a separation of functional (good) goals-hierarchy in activity and learning from a power-coerced (bad) goals-hierarchy seems striking. So can we shape another argument that links power-coercion to our oldest and deepest models of functionality, efficiency, and even rationality. (Only radical postmodernists, and a few neo-Marxists, go so far as to say that rationality itself is a culturally biased construct that presupposes the coercive-power-backed dominance of the arbiters of rationality over Others.)

I have also been reading Pierre Bourdieu, and I believe that in his notion of habitus, as socially structured and structuring, embodied dispositions relevant to dynamic acting-in-context, he is also striving toward the sort of model Alfred sketches as:

"such structures need not contain a representation of one end-state yet can imply a large set of attracting and constrain- ing possibilities that together enforce directed behavior. ... All that such structures, internal and external combined, do is that they can make certain events more and others less likely."

Bourdieu is not as explicit as Alfred or we need to be about the embodiment being that of the whole activity, and not of the human participant alone, though this is consistent with his view of how the habitus comes to link macrosocial relations to the microso- cial life-trajectories of individuals.

I also certainly like Alfred's way of speaking about the activity not needing to "contain a representation of one end-state yet can imply a large set of attracting and constraining possibilities." The notion of a dynamic attractor here is quite consistent with nonlinear physics models of self-organizing systems.

I say let us analyze goals-hierarchy discourse as folk-theory science no longer needs to see how it is historically laden with ideology and how that ideology functions socially. And let us see how well we can do with alternative discourses, of which there are now plenty of interestingly plausible (and in some domains well tested) ones available. Among these I would count many of the AT efforts to define object-orientedness as an aspect of ac- tivity itself, and not as a mentalistic intentionality imposing itself on activity, from above. But even here a certain caution may not be out of place regarding the use of the hierarchical model.

I believe we are now sophisticated enough to be able to dis- tinguish among the many different principles of hierarchization employed in our theoretical discourses (specification hierar- chies, constituency hierarchies, contextualization or redundancy hierarchies, etc.). Only one of these, the control hierarchy (aka cybernetic or functionalist hierarchy) is being questioned here, and only as it applies to non-designed systems and processes (though we might also question the desirability of designing our institutional and mechanical artifacts according to this princi- ple).

In the AT model of a hierarchy among Activity-Action-Operation, I suspect, and leave it to others to comment, that this need not be interpreted as a control hierarchy, but can also be construed as a constituency or contextualization hierarchy. It is mainly when we try to view it solely in terms of object-orientedness at each of these levels that we may occasionally be misled by deep habit to letting the object-tails wag the activity-dogs, and see the relations as those entailed by a goal-hierarchy. I think this, however, would necessitate giving a kind of autonomy to the ob- jectives of activity that is unwarranted by the spirit of AT.

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**13.21. Date: Sat, 6 Nov 93 23:08:33 -0800**

From: ematusov@cats.UCSC.EDU  
Subject: who decides goals?  
To: xact@ucsd.edu, xclass@ucsd.edu

I agree with Jay Lemke that it is not responsibility of the teacher to define the task for the children and control the kids to stay on the task. I see the purpose of learning is sharing and creating interests in both the teacher and students. The asymmetrical role of the teacher is in facilitating this process rather than in his/her monopoly on power. The teacher-students asymmetry still involves shared responsibility for defining goals and tracking the activity. Staying on task is not good or bad itself. It can be mutual agreement, in one case; rigidity of the participants, in another case; and exercise of teacher's monopoly of power in the third case.

Eugene Matusov

University of California at Santa Cruz

**13.22. Date: Sat, 06 Nov 93 22:37:18 EST**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@cunyvms.bitnet>  
Subject: Goals in life  
To: Activity Theory Group <XACT@UCSD.BitNet>

A brief explication. Bonnie Nardi offers the cases of people who "keep an object in mind and may spend years trying to achieve it", as with getting a degree or having a child, and other shorter span projects, as examples, presumably, of stable goals.

But are they indeed so stable? How exactly are we to define the goal in these cases? by the verbal statements and paraphrases we use to ourselves as reminders and exhortations? or by the immediate meaning and contextualization of where our actions are tending at the moment? Does wanting to have a child mean the same thing to the infertile mother in relation to all the actions she may take that she subsumes under this "goal"? Is it not reasonable to see here the action of a process of \*construction\* of continuity of goal-directedness (as of other dimensions of our sense of personal identity)? That by most criteria of a workable methodology for the analysis of activity, the de facto, effective, operative goals can as easily be seen to be changing as to remain constant? But that we draw them together, as we draw our sense of our selfhood together, to create unity and continuity as our culture teaches us to do?

And the undoubted "power of human motivation"? Does this come then from some overarching rubric of a goal under which we subsume so many different actions and feelings? from some representation of a fixed and invariant end-state? or from a much larger and more complex, dynamically developing, system of processes in which we participate body and soul, and which we have learned to speak of in the language of goals? JAY.

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### **13.23. Date: Sat, 06 Nov 93 22:37:52 EST**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@cunyvm.bitnet>

Subject: Symbols and percepts

To: Activity Theory Group <XACT@UCSD.BitNet>

Joe Toth asks what "draws" us to or from something. The metaphor here seems a bit inseparable from the discourse of action-at-a distance in physics, but that applies to us only in the respects in which we are like non-semiotically mediated systems (like electrons in the extreme case). Joe's cross-species examples make clear the origins of semiotic mediation in brain-body construction of salient inputs reentrantly "interpreted" as if desirable, enmeshed in interactive behavior complexes in which we go after these objects of "desire".

"If an external entity is perceived by the organism, where is the symbolism?" What the organism perceives is not what is external, but the result of its active construction of a percept, i.e. the result of its interaction with the external, and part of that construction is the role of reentrant connections from language centers and other subnets of the brain-body system which introduce the effects of semiotic mediation into ALL perception. There is no perception of the meaningless (for ordinary purposes of the sort we have here; there are interesting exceptions). An "object" can be for us both simply an external object (as we have been culturally taught to consider it) and a symbolically meaningful object (in many senses, pace Peirce). E.g. the "goal".

"Moreover, if the external entity is internalized and reflected upon in absence of the original stimulus, say as an image, then is the internalization only a representation or an analog of the external "symbol"? Now it's a bit tricky to be quite sure what we mean here by "absence of the original stimulus" since (a) we never perceived that hypothetical "stimulus" unmediated, and (b) what we did perceive originated in a \*complex\* of neural firing patterns that depended on many other "contextual" as well as semiotically mediating features, and it's not really likely that

we *\*would\** be conjuring up this image again unless MOST of those were again active. What we get, however, is now more likely to be a good fit with our cultural, and personal, preconceptions about how what we saw ought to have looked -- the image comfortably standing in for what it is supposed to in the rest of the overall pattern, with much less of the potential for anomalous details than directly interactive perception can present us with.

And, yes, of course all forms of semiotic mediation are included, not just the symbolic in more limited sense, as in, say, Peirce.

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### **13.24. Date: Sat, 06 Nov 93 22:36:19 EST**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@cunyvm.bitnet>

Subject: Salvaging goals

To: Activity Theory Group <XACT@UCSD.BitNet>

Arne Raeithel has proposed a salvage of the notion of goal, and one that seems in keeping with the spirit of AT: that a goal is a material component of the activity which is double-functioning also as a sign of a future state or outcome of the activity.

The direction of this move may be fruitful, but perhaps not quite in this initial form. Recall Alfred Lang's useful end-run around the need for the system (here the activity, including the processes of the human participants) to contain a representation of a precise end-state. His version was rather that the embodied dynamics of the activity, which in cases like games (and most activities to some degree) is a regularized (recognizable, quasi-repeatable *\*type\**, like the "genres" that Bazerman points to) one based on past participations, will, like Bourdieu's habitus (he also uses athletic participation as a frequent example of how habitus operates in the moment of action), bias the probable outcomes or choices of each next action so as to in effect implicitly define an attractor (in the nonlinear dynamics sense) of the total dynamical system. This is a "goal" which is neither necessarily explicitly intended, nor indeed locally represented in the system; rather it is an aspect of the system *\*as a whole\**.

Arne makes an interesting case that the goal *\*may\** have an explicit symbolic representation, and that this may explicitly play a role in action. Where the goal and the material state of the system have an immediate real-time identity (ball in or not in goal-frame), we may not be able to, nor need to distinguish between two cases:



(1) the goalkeeper's almost instantaneous swerve to block the ball involved some conscious, explicit rational calculation in terms of the "goal" of the game, his "role" in it, his intention to block, etc. vs. (2) a quasi-automatic, habit-like (but more flexible; say, embodied dispositional) response to the contingencies of the moment, so that no explicit, separate sign-representational process intervened (mediated), but rather what appears retrospectively as goal-directed action is an outcome of the habits and practice of the player, which, in learning the game, has been partially mediated by such an explicit sign-representational process.

As I say, in some cases, this may not be a very meaningful distinction; the semiotic dimension of the total activity may be indistinguishable from a separable mediation. In fact we often do not want to think of the mediation as separate from the activity itself. But there are also many other situations, I think, where such a distinction can be usefully made. Bourdieu discusses at some length in *Logic of Action* how the retrospective (or distanced, observer-, theoretical-, synoptic-, atemporal) perspective on action (more prominent in type 1 accounts) needs to be complemented by the more dynamic, participatory, real-time, fully contingent, disposition-guided but not explicitly goal-directed type 2 account.

So I will say, yes, sometimes (and I think there is a middle-class bias to overemphasize this) we distance ourselves enough in the midst of action that our sign-representation of a possible future-state (or even of our ideal execution of our normative role) plays a separable, explicitly mediating part in our action. In other cases, the semiotic mediation is indistinguishable from the meaning of the action-in-flux itself (and so is no longer the tool for conscious control that it is in the first case); and in still other cases, there is no such meaning until someone (including the actor) retrospectively constructs it.

It does seem to me that, in AT terms, it is at the level of operations that we are nearest to the last case, and at the level of activity nearest to the first. But these are as much modes-of-being-in-the-activity as they are levels of contributory functioning.

Returning for a moment to Bazerman's view of activity genres, which I largely share, at least for some sorts of activity, we have again I think a model in which it is the *\*whole\** of the enacted activity (produced structure) that allows us to define the goal, and not any representation of an end-state contained within it. In fact I have struggled for quite a while to find a workable way to understand how people re-enact genres, contingently at every act/operation point, but still with the net result being a recognizable instance of the "game" or texttype. This was also in part Bourdieu's guiding problem. His solution in terms of embodied dispositions nicely complements mine in terms of dynamic semiotic/semantic "biases" (really metaredundancies) that are preserved (by being materially embodied, inertial) during activity in ways characteristic of a culture (elaborated in my paper on Textproduction and Dynamic Text Semantics for one special case). JAY.

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**13.25. Date: Sun, 7 Nov 93 18:32:38 -0800**

From: ematusov@cats.UCSC.EDU

Subject: Ed value of not staying on task

To: xact@ucsd.edu, xclass@ucsd.edu

It is difficult for me as a former school teacher to acknowledge that non-staying on task has a great educational value. Moreover, I think that non-staying on task is necessary for learning. Let me start first with spelling out benefits of non- staying on task and then turn to why it is necessary for learning.

The first benefit is metathinking. Metathinking requires to cease working on the task because it focuses on priorities and motivation. Child should think of what is important and interesting for him/her. Metathinking is time of creating and making choices. It is also time for managing child's own time and responsibility for her/his own learning. Non-staying on task allows self-initiated learning for the children as well. All of these are specially important for life-long learning skills.

Of course, valuing non-staying on task does not mean that the child should be left completely by his/her own. It is a role of the teacher to help the child with choice creating and making, with setting learning expectations, learning how to use help from others, and so on. Under this condition of teacher's help, even child's wasting time can become useful child's experience that promote better future management of his/her own time. Otherwise, without teacher's help, the child would be completely overwhelmed and cut from his/her zone of proximal development.

Is child's staying without a task risky? Yes. But without teacher's risk there cannot be child's zone of proximal development. Moreover, as Newman, Griffin, & Cole argued in their book "The construction zone" (1989), child's zone of proximal development means teacher's zone of proximal development as well:

>Just as the children do not have to know the full cultural  
>analysis of a tool to begin using it, the teacher does not have a  
>complete analysis of the children's understanding of the  
>situation to start their actions in the larger system. (p.63)

There is no secure teaching and secure learning. Both of them involves risk. Without allowing risk and, I would add, trust, and high expectations, the teacher trains the students but not teaches. Dewey analyzing the difference between

education and training drew an example of a horse whose actions were modified by human beings:

>A clew [of the difference between education and training] may  
>be found in the fact that the horse does not really share in the  
>social use to which his action is put. Some one else uses the  
>horse to secure a result which is advantageous by making it  
>advantageous to the horse to perform the act - he gets food,  
>etc. But the horse, presumably, does not get any new interest.  
>He remains interested in food, not in the service he is  
>rendering. He is not a partner in a shared activity. Were he to  
>become a copartner, he would, in engaging in the conjoint  
>activity, have the same interest in its accomplishment which  
>others have. He would share their ideas and emotions  
(Dewey, 1916/44, p.13).

Traditionally, for the sake of preparation of the student for future adult life, school has done a great deal of training instead of education: job training, skill training, test training -- all those modifications of student's actions that require external control to secure a result. However, training does not reach the goal. Because when external control is removed (or becomes less efficient) individuals are eager to cease the activity. Besides, external control does not provide sharing goal, interests, and meaning of the activity and, hence, does not foster responsibility, flexibility, and initiative in the students. As Heath (1991) noticed, parents not only want their children to read, but they want their children to WANT to read. Only promoting students' development by sharing interests between students and teachers guarantees expansion of students' interests in all areas of human life. To learn how to learn simply means learn how to develop a new interest, I would argue.

Making children stay on task all the time does not promote their genuine learning because it places all responsibility for the activity on the teacher. It means that responsibility for creating and choosing task, managing own time, metathinking, fostering own interests, self-initiated learning, and so on would never be shared with the children. Thus, when the teacher does not allow the children to be without a task, the children do not have opportunity to learn how to learn. Unfortunately, I saw only one school (Open Classroom in Salt Lake City, Utah) where teachers know how to support children while they are not on task.

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University of California at Santa Cruz.

**13.26. Date: Sun, 07 Nov 1993 18:27:05 -0500 (EST)**

From: GORD\_WELLS@OISE.ON.CA  
Subject: Re: Goals and Power  
To: xclass@ucsd.edu

There seem to be two threads in the discussion of goals, as applied to classroom learning-and-teaching. The first has to do with the possibility of large numbers of participants orienting to the same superordinate goals (even accepting that they may well be redefined over the course of the activity). The second concerns the desirability of any attempt on the part of the teacher to establish such goals.

I certainly agree with Eugene when he says:

<<I see the purpose of learning is sharing and creating interests in both the teacher and students. The asymmetrical role of the teacher is in facilitating this process rather than in his/her monopoly on power.>>

In arguing that the teacher may need to apply a little 'pressure' to help students stay with the agreed-upon task, I was not arguing that the teacher's goals are always and by definition of greater importance than the student's and that therefore the use of power is justified by virtue of the teacher's status and greater expertise. Rather, I was appealing to the larger framework in which classrooms are viewed as communities of inquiry in which teachers assist students to appropriate important practices of the culture within activities that the students have agreed to take on as their own.

However, I also agree with Jay's analysis of the example I cited:

<<In Gordon's classroom examples, it is always the teacher who sets highest level goals, who maintains their stability, and who decides when it is appropriate for a goal, at any level, to be changed or an activity to be counted as "on task" for her original goal.>>

Perhaps it is our point of reference that differs. I am writing about classrooms in which there are 30 to 35 nine and ten-year-olds, who certainly need a structure within which to learn, interact and have fun. This structure is usually supplied by there being agreed-upon 'highest-level goals'.

Jay, by contrast, seems to have in mind a rather different situation in which a smaller number of young adult independent learners can make good use of the resources available to plan and carry out their own activities, without the need for anyone else to organize their time and energy. However, to try to apply the criteria for teaching that one might derive from this latter situation to the former seems to me to be unrealistically idealistic.

At the same time, I do agree with what Jay sees to be the problematic nature of an adult prescribing and monitoring learners' goals when the intention is to enable them to become independent goal-setters, etc. Edwards and Mercer, in *\*Common Knowledge\** (1987), observed that one of the biggest problems about the teaching they observed was the teachers failure to 'hand over' responsibility to the learners for those parts of the activities that they could manage on their own. And it is certainly true that teachers are often unwilling to recognize when students can manage on their own, perhaps for the sorts of reasons that Jay has suggested.

However, I don't think that this is a knock-down argument against teachers organizing learning activities in the classroom. Rather, what needs to be thought about is:

1) How should curricular units be selected by the teacher to take account of

a) his or her beliefs about the sorts of activities that are

intrinsically worthwhile and have potential for fruitful outcomes (Dewey)

b) the current interests and capabilities of the students, which are in

many respects heterogeneous

c) the requirements of the locally-in-force curricular guidelines re.

topics to be studied and expected outcomes

d) the time-table and the available resources of books, materials,

etc.?

2) How should these units be organized:

a) to optimize the opportunities for students to share in the determination

of goals, the operational means by which they are achieved, and the manner in

which the outcomes are evaluated?

b) the need for the teacher to be able to give responsive guidance and

assistance, as it is needed by individual students or groups of students,

while still ensuring that all members of the class are making good use of

the opportunities available?

It is easy to provide idealistic answers to these very complex practical questions from the ivory towers to which the telephone lines of this network are connected. It is not so easy to find optimal answers from 9 to 4, five days a week, when there are also many other complex issues to be dealt with simultaneously.

It would be good to hear from some practising classroom teachers as to how THEY view these issues, and about the best solutions that they have found to date.

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**13.27. Date: Sun, 7 Nov 1993 16:12:43 -0800**

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>  
Subject: idealistic answers  
To: xclass@ucsd.edu

Gordon and Jay;

I am a little uncertain as to what an "ideal" educational system is in your view(s). Gordon, you say something to the effect that imagining classrooms as selforganizing systems with the kids determining the higher order goals is idealistic? Jay? This is something you are advocating? It sounds that way. But before commenting further, I wanted to check.

mike

Michael Cole

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**13.28. Date: Mon, 08 Nov 1993 08:08:04 -0500 (EST)**

From: GORD\_WELLS@OISE.ON.CA  
Subject: Re: Idealistic answers  
To: xclass@ucsd.edu

<<Gordon, you say something to the effect that imagining classrooms as selforganizing systems with the kids determining the higher order goals is idealistic?>>

Yes, I did say that I think it's idealistic to think that, in a class of 30 elementary school students, the students can always determine the highEST order goals. That is the ideal that I would strive for, while recognizing that, in practice, the teacher will have to make many of these decisions in the interest of a well-functioning community of inquiry.

I think the same is true of any organized public education. For example, Mike, who initially chooses the papers to be read in a graduate level class? Who decides the parameters of the assignment(s)?

As I have emphasized, though, this does not mean that the teacher does not seek student involvement in deciding how to go about achieving these goals, nor encourage them to develop them along lines that THEY think are important.

Gordon

**13.29. Date: Mon, 08 Nov 1993 15:00:18 -0400 (EDT)**

From: KINGIL@bcvax1.bc.edu  
Subject: Goals, power, and not on task behavior  
To: xclass@weber.ucsd.edu

I am responding to the general discussion this past weekend on goals set by the teacher, as proposed by WELLS, the value of not on task behavior, as proposed by Matusov, and the issues of power raised by Wells and Lemke I believe.

As many of you may remember, you assisted me in exploring performance based standardized assessment with minority populations this past spring. I conducted a pilot study of 4th and 5th graders with a new national test. One part required groups or pairs to work on a task presented in math, science, or reading. One of the major outcomes from my observations was that the children were not 'on task' but had chosen their own goals. Observed from a process perspective, they achieved some of those goals by sacrificing the 'goal' set by the test developers. The problem became that they were being evaluated by the rubrics made against those goals, not on how they had achieved them or why they may not have chosen to finish work toward those goals, seeing them as subsidiaries of their own focus.

In particular, the rubrics made no accommodation for group process as part of the evaluation. Yet one pair focused on competition rather than cooperation and did not complete the science experiment. Another group of three focused on equity of resources and so proclaimed the lack of materials as allowing them to complete the work. Yet another group lacked the skills to negotiate the correct product with a powerful boy who was proceeding with all the wrong answers. When I challenged them, they said they knew he was wrong but they weren't going to tell him.

In my report, I try to illuminate the cooperative processes that each group demonstrated or hindered expression of what they might have known. I also discuss the deviation of goals as a major problem. I challenge the fact that inferences are then drawn on this test which claim to make statements about science knowledge when at the very least it should be qualified as science knowledge which can be demonstrated within a group.

As an evaluator of children individually for the past 19 years, I was always cautious about the statements I would make about a test, for instance claiming intelligence from the PPVT is ludicrous and should be stated at the very least as receptive language quotient.

Or calling the Gray oral and the Spache both reading tests when one is based on errors and perfection, no restatements allowed, yet no comprehension needed and the other based on final performance as reading with accuracy, corrections allowed and expected and liberally so, but a combination of accuracy and comprehension balanced out. Which is a better method of judging true reading?

One of my fears with performance assessment is that teachers are judging only products, but reform is emphasizing process! What tools do teachers have to make process, where expertise of teacher is really illuminated, into part of assessment in a less subjective way? I deal with this in my report as mastery strategies along side the cooperative strategies. They are simplistic at this time and need much input from the field. But they are individually sensitive and don't expect the same profile for every learner or even every situation so they hold promise of being some sense of equality to minority populations and making teachers more individualized in assessment, not just in the process or choices the children make. There is still no flexibility demonstrated in judging final products where comparison, thus competition, is once more into play. I am distressed that not more focus is put on bringing process assessment out of the learning disabilities closet and into the mainstream where it could benefit all.

Comments welcome.

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**13.30. Date: Mon, 8 Nov 1993 18:11:50 +0100 (MET)**

From: raeithel@rzdspc1.informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)

Subject: Rules and Goals (2nd try)

To: xact@ucsd.edu



Sorry if for some of you this appears twice. I have not seen this coming over XACT since I sent it yesterday, therefore send again.

Arne.

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I have been thinking in what sense Yrjo Engestrom was looking at the ten commandments as rules. For me, rules must have a component that says when the rule is applicable (if situation is x), and an action part (then do y) in which either a symbol to call up an operation, or the expected result of the action is presented.

The ten commandments lack any if-part, they are absolute rules, then. They name what should be the case -- or, more often, what should *\*not\** happen in our daily affairs.

Thus it seems that a goal is part of a certain rule (action part is anticipated result, and the habitual style of action -- mesh of operations -- is assumed on the level of discursive self-regulation), while other rules have operation symbols as then-parts with result unspecified but determined by the material conditions.

In another sense, Yrjo is also right that the commandment are rules: In his triangular diagram rules are the mediators between actors and the community of practice. In the biblical case, the religious community was defined by the rules in a certain extent. This means that the absoluteness of the commandments-as-rules is only valid from within the community. From a more decentred stance, there is an if-part, namely: "If you want to be one of us" then make happen states one to ten always.

With regard to Jay Lemke's recent notes I want to agree that the determining power of both rules and goals is not very great, and that the meaning of both situational and operational symbols of course shifts when the course of action is highly unstable. There are many workplaces, however, not only in the armies and schools, where material constraints and power structures band together against the self-organisation and development of community goals.

I would not think that the level of joint activities is most affected by symbolic self-regulation via goals, rules, principles, etc.. As I understand it there is nothing like the usual "Holy Rule" pyramid of command and obedience between activities and actions. Rather, activities and their patternings over the social positions and roles - - what Elias means by "figurations" -- have that very same self-organizing, but also self-constraining quality that is captured in Bourdieu's stratified map of habitual styles of the social classes (la distinction).

I would like to confine the goal and the rule to the action level and regard both operation level and activity level as context with respect to symbolic discursive self-

regulation: The "lower" or "inner" context of embodied and "external" operational means (taken together, without much regard to the actors in whose actions they are appearing), and the "outer" context of figurations, genres, social drama, etc. which always is a specific selection of all possible means, has a recognizable gestalt or style.

Arne.

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Arne Raeithel  
Uni Hamburg, Psychologie

**13.31. Date: Mon, 8 Nov 1993 15:04:08 -0500**

From: cb47@prism.gatech.edu  
Subject: Re: Salvaging goals  
To: xact@ucsd.edu

>Returning for a moment to Bazerman's view of activity genres,  
>which I largely share, at least for some sorts of activity, we  
>have again I think a model in which it is the \*whole\* of the  
>enacted activity (produced structure) that allows us to define  
>the goal, and not any representation of an end-state contained  
>within it. In fact I have struggled for quite a while to find a  
>workable way to understand how people re-enact genres, con-  
>tingently at every act/operation point, but still with the net  
>result being a recognizable instance of the "game" or texttype.  
>This was also in part Bourdieu guiding problem. His solution in  
>terms of embodied dispositions nicely complements mine in terms  
>of dynamic semiotic/semantic "biases" (really metaredundancies)  
>that are preserved (by being materially embodied, inertial) dur-  
>ing activity in ways characteristic of a culture (elaborated in  
>my paper on Textproduction and Dynamic Text Semantics for one  
>special case).

Indeed in some circumstances the typified behavior is so much part of an unreflective perception of situation, a habitual positioning of the self, and a repertoire that is deeply associated with the moment, that people are attracted into a form of being (or tropically move into a form of unreflective self-actualization/realization) that they enact themselves and carry out actions according to type without being aware of it.

However, levels of reflective understanding and guiding of behavior are possible. Consider, most simply, someone who has an explicit and overt understanding of several alternative genres--let us say a research article, an abstract, and an interview statement for the local newspaper. As well the person has an intimate and practical knowledge of the features and details by which meaning can be enacted in each of those genres. In such a case, one can select, guide, and organize one's statement according to type, with recognition of the social recognizability, usability, and force of each.

Reflective behavior and acting to type may occur with vaying depth and comprehensiveness of the reflective representation, as well as with great variety in the content or orientation or representational form of the reflection that helps shape behavior. This reflective template may at times provide a path that leads one away from the commitments, desires, goals (if I may) other representations, etc that are enacted within differently typified situations (in that case we see a kind of divorce or falseness or thinness in what we might see as a coercion of genre or typification) Ot this reflective template might be well connected in various ways to the elements enacted in other situations--allowing a kind of connected re-enactment (changed) and extension of parts of the self upon a new and different typified field of enactment.

If you (or any other xacters) are interested I follow outsome related ideas in a paper "Systems of Genre and the enactment of Social Intentions" in a forthcoming book RETHINKING GENRE, edited by Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway. I can email it to those interested.

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### **13.32. Date: Mon, 8 Nov 1993 15:28:46 -0500**

From: cb47@prism.gatech.edu  
Subject: Re: Rules and Goals (2nd try)  
To: xact@ucsd.edu

Arne,

Could you explain the following in some greater detail? It sounds real important, but I'm not sure I get it, and maybe others share my difficulty.

- >I would like to confine the goal and the rule to the action level
- >and regard both operation level and activity level as context
- >with respect to symbolic discursive self-regulation: The "lower"
- >or "inner" context of embodied and "external" operational means (taken

>together, without much regard to the actors in whose actions  
>they are appearing), and the "outer" context of figurations,  
>genres, social drama, etc. which always is a specific selection  
>of all possible means, has a recognizable gestalt or style.  
>

Chuck

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### **13.33. Date: Mon, 8 Nov 1993 13:57:29 -0800**

From: nardi@taurus.apple.com (Bonnie Nardi)

Subject: more on goals

To: xact@weber.ucsd.edu

I see no reason to suppose that people cannot have stable goals. I see no reason why we should assume a priori that goals are continually being constructed and re-constructed; in fact that makes very little sense to me. Certainly our actions, in activity theory terms, must be adjusted to meet current conditions, but not necessarily our goals (really "object" in the AT sense). I am curious as to why the stability of goals is seen as somehow threatening to the study of situated cognition, or at any rate, why the resistance to the idea is so strong.

What is the "moment" of which Jay Lemke speaks? ("where our actions are tending at the moment?") For the analyst with a video camera the "moment" might be a second or a minute or an hour, but for the life lived it could be months or years or decades. I think our methodologies and analytical biases (the study of conversation, use of video cameras etc.) should be analyzed as to how they color our theoretical concepts. Let us deconstruct ourselves as much as the rest of the world.

I do not think we can reduce deeply felt goals to "reminders and exhortations" in Jay's words. The infertile mother is in no way "reminding" herself that she does not have a baby. That is to deny people's humanity, their striving after something that they deem worthy. Perhaps we need to go back to literature, to get ourselves back in touch with the shape of a life, beyond our meager scientific concepts.

I think there are sometimes "fixed and invariant states" that are goals -- in many cases of the ugliest dimensions, such as ethnic cleansing, or Hitler's Final Solution, to take some extreme examples. That is why I said that people with goals can be dangerous. The goals can be collective, they can be the instruments of political power, but they are still stable goals in which an end state is, sometimes

horrifyingly, envisioned. Certainly we may "subsume many actions" under such a rubric, but it is a (terrifying) directive force nonetheless. Alfred Lang's point about goals imposed from the outside is a good one, and the process by which people come to buy into such activities as ethnic cleansing is one we should try to understand. Also the process by which they come to try to resist such activities as well. The risks taken by those in the Resistance (WWII), the Underground Railroad (American Civil War), etc., cannot be understood in any terms in which "actions of the moment" are the chief analytical tool; there is deeply felt conviction, religious or philosophical belief, love, and other imponderables which feed and form "goals" at work here.

Goals, and the pursuit of goals, then, may show us at our worst, or our best, but they are a defining characteristic of human life.

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Bonnie Nardi

### **13.34. Date: Tue, 09 Nov 93 18:40:19 EST**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@cunyvm.bitnet>  
Subject: Process Evaluation  
To: Classroom Studies Group <XCLASS@UCSD.BitNet>

I'm all for Ilda Carreiro King's critique of product assessment as missing an essential process-assessment dimension. Not, of course that I am all that much in favor of coercive enforcement of curricular standards to begin with. But given the reality of how education works to enforce conformity with cultural norms, we can at least try to be more honest and comprehensive about what those norms are.

Our political ideologies of evaluation (call them cultural canons if that's more comfortable) dictate that in education (and many other aspects of social activity) we evaluate: individuals and products. We evaluate products because that is what we sell; economically in a system based on universal commodification, everything of value is a product. From this viewpoint, it doesn't matter how much you know about math, or how creative you are at problem-solving strategies, it only matters whether this answer is correct (marketable). *Mutatis mutandis*, an essay or report or experimental result.

But commodities are produced by labor, and labor is itself commodified (more euphemistically) as individuals. To exploit someone's labor effectively, you pay for the labor, not for the product of the labor. So when you buy labor, you are buying productive capacity to make products. Hence we have a concept of "ability" as a characteristic of the unit of labor commodity, the individual. You buy someone who *\*can\**, you hope, make marketable products. The best evidence is that they have done so in the past.

So we evaluate products, and we evaluate individuals in terms of their products.

But things are not so simple. Products today are the product of complex systems involving the labor of many individuals, so we invent new "abilities" such as being able to work effectively in groups/teams, and again try to attach these to individuals.

Situated cognition models show us that all this is a pretty hopelessly poor approximation: you cannot assign a productive capacity to an individual outside of the system in which that individual functions. Ilda King gives many examples of the system-dependence of what are mistakenly called properties of individuals. But we don't, mostly yet, buy and sell whole teams or systems (actually we do now make whole companies into commodities, a sort of logical progress of capitalism, but we still fetishize individuals: the great CEOs who can singlehandedly turn a company's profitability around). We still buy individuals, and this is a contradiction in the present social-economic order.

Process evaluation assays to look at what people do and how they do it as participants in various local systems. It can make claims about potential productive capacity, quality of final product, only by very long and tenuous chains of argumentation. It is better able to make claims about marketable individuals, but its inner logic goes halfway to recognizing that these claims are hard to generalize across systems/situations.

Our traditional unit of labor is simply no longer viable as a unit of productive capacity. Capital's demands for and support of educational reform, accountability, standards, etc. all arise from this painful dilemma: no labels attached to units of labor today seem sufficiently reliable predictors of productive capacity. There is no solution to this problem. Process evaluation is one of our responses to the problem, but it cannot provide a solution.

I predict that what the logic of the contradiction will most likely drive us toward is a return to product evaluation in the strict sense: samples of job-relevant or job-identical past production -- the direction of portfolio evaluation and of many new forms of personnel screening, especially for temporary or consultant-like employment. The same logic could actually revolutionize the economic order if it forces a turn to paying for product rather than buying labor as such. Many people today speculate about the electronic cottage industry of the future; everybody self-employed, free-lance. There are problems of course with this scenario, but that is a much bigger issue.

We might do better to try just to describe what it is students \*do\* do, and leave to the purchaser to decide whether that is likely to have productive value in the context of their system. In any case I don't think we can discuss the value of different approaches to educational evaluation outside the context of some model of what the actual and potential uses of the evaluation would be.

JAY.

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### **13.35. Date: Tue, 09 Nov 93 18:38:14 EST**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@cunyvm.bitnet>

Subject: An Educational Ideal

To: Classroom Studies Group <XCLASS@UCSD.BitNet>

I'm not much given to universalizing about ideals, Mike, but in answer to your question, from where I sit in culture, gender, class, age, and specific social trajectory, I figure it is nearly impossible in practice for any sort of educational system not to be mainly replicative and coercive. So my ideal is to strive against this as mightily as possible, expecting little (and surely nothing radically dangerous) as a result.

I believe that by reducing coercive strategies we liberate potential divergence, and that the larger system in which we are all embedded will regulate what happens ultimately to this divergence. I do not believe Rousseau (or Piaget, or Chomsky) that left to our own devices we will develop wonderfully; we will not develop into anything any human culture would consider worthwhile. But we do not need Education, i.e. deliberate instructional arrangements, to insure that we develop as members of our culture, or that we acquire its basic semiotic tools, and the strategies and dispositions for deploying them particular to our social caste.

What we need is access to resources and to models, opportunities to participate in activity types and engage with resources. There are advantages sometimes to doing this in the context of collective activity; sometimes it is simply necessary to do so. There are advantages sometimes (and necessity sometimes) to include participation of a more-experienced actor (though such a person is rarely our only access to models).

Whoever and whatever the participants, the activity is always already embedded in a much larger ecosocial system of activities and processes. It is always already a self-organizing subsystem of a larger self-organizing supersystem.

Coercive power, unevenly distributed, is part of all such systems. Its primary effect is always to limit diversity.

We say (cf. Gordon Wells' post about younger vs older students) that we must be more coercive earlier in development because the immature organisms/persons cannot regulate their own behavior productively, but we mean that they diverge from our notions of what is appropriate and productive, and it is generally true that earlier in development the potential for divergence is greater and requires more constant coercive force to thwart it. In fact immature organisms regulate their behavior, with

the help of the embedding supersystem (including social caregivers), quite well for survival purposes. They are just as well adapted to their environments in a basic sense as we are to ours. But we are, as a society and a culture, simply afraid to see our children diverge from us in significant and unpredictable ways, and we do everything we can to stop them. Education functions as much or more to limit than to empower.

The ideal educational system? Can you imagine an adult sufficiently resourceful and "irresponsible" to assist in every way possible a small group of children to learn or to do absolutely anything they took it into their heads to learn or to do? Or a supportive community of adults? No curriculum. No goals. No limits. (But this does not, of course, mean no teacher-organized activities, which will sometimes be part of the assistance to be given, but now in the context of student-generated "goals", or of group -- including adult -- generated projects, and accompanying also student-organized activities, some including the adult, some not.)

How close to my extremal ideal could we get? probably we would want or feel we need some limits: keep them from getting killed (ends the educational options, but powerfully couples to natural selection), keep them from killing us (add "selfless" to "irresponsible"), warn them about serious, irreversible material consequences of emerging actions.

What I think many people do in overestimating, and mistaking, the role of education is to suppose that anything even remotely like my "ideal" would lead to total anarchy and the fall of civilization in a single generation. That view derives I think from the implicit assumption that learners are isolated individuals; it ignores that we are always powerfully enmeshed in social systems of practices that extend far beyond education. Education has simply failed, repeatedly, to socially engineer attitudes and dispositions that run counter to those of the caste-specific life experiences of groups of students. Even families cannot "educate" their kids very far from customary norms. Families, peer groups, and educational institutions all work only so long as they work WITH, as instrumentalities of, these prevailing patterns.

You want change? You have to be willing to live with the risks of divergence. You can interrupt the socialization process, create a space for potential change, but you cannot control its direction.

The hallmark of an ideal educational arrangement? Unpredictability of outcomes.

JAY.

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**13.36. Date: Tue, 9 Nov 93 13:06:38 +0200**

From: kuutti@rieska.oulu.fi  
Subject: building things with or without "goals"  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

The "goal" discussion has been fascinating to follow, but I feel a bit puzzled. I'm coming from the engineering side of fence, where people actually build things. I have problems in figuring out, how something can be built without an idea of what should be built. If that is not a "goal" then what it is and how could design processes become meaningfully and operationally studied without some notion of where they are aimed at?

In building things, both persistence and fluidity of "goals" are common issues. Have an idea, start to build and cope with practical problems you encounter. In doing that you may have to revise your initial ideas. However, some ideas are usually more persistent than others, and these might be called "goals".

Let me take a personal example: a few years ago I practically rebuilt our old house, doing a lot of carpenter work myself. When planning the changes to be made, I got an idea of making the upper floor more roomy and airy by replacing the multitude of vertical struts supporting the roof by a couple of strong horizontal beams. I had a vision of what kind of room would be the result - wide and high, walls and ceiling following the form of the roof. How it could be realised in practice I had only a vague idea instead. It took more than two years before the beams were there and three years before the room was in the final condition. During that time, my ideas of the practical realisation were reconstructed on a daily basis in designing, calculations, negotiations and compromises with the authorities and finally in coping with all the practical problems of actual construction. But the initial vision of the room and the beams stayed relatively stable: it was one of the major factors shaping the plan for the upper floor and many smaller design decisions were measured against the effect they would have to it. It even helped me to overcome the desperate moments and to continue when a rotten structure was found just under the spot where I had planned to bring a major pillar for to support the roof and it seemed that my plan was failing. And when the beams finally were up and struts removed, and the space started to get a shape, I was deeply satisfied: yes, it was worth of the effort.

Because the new structure was more difficult to build (and more expensive, too!) than staying with the old would have been, then what it was that was guiding me in the process? If the idea of the beams-room will not qualify for me as a "goal" then what might be the proper term? (In AT terms it could be called as the object of an activity (within or in a network of a larger, house-building activity)).

--Kari Kuutti

Univ. Oulu, Finland

**13.37. Date: Tue, 9 Nov 1993 11:46:06 +0100 (MET)**

From: raeithel@rzdspc1.informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)  
Subject: Need for a pause to think  
To: xact@ucsd.edu

It seems to me now that the debate about the goal concept is getting too dense, and it could be very well my fault to a considerable share.

I cannot untangle this at present, because all participants in this debate say important things, yet are using their terms quite differently.

Alfred, for instance, now draws the concept of object into the debate, which is relational for me (following Leontyev) but apparently not for him.

Bonnie stresses enduring motives and that persons produce sense and direction by embracing them -- be it wrongly or rightly in a moral and ethical view. I do agree with her as regards the phenomenon, but would not use the goal concept, rather I would try to analyse societal forms as the main source of stability, not the varying actions of individuals.

The problem is how to not deny the influence and possible power of individuals and groups, because it is new forms, new activity systems that I see as the most challenging objects of scientific and political activities.

None of the contributors sees it very much differently in these general terms, I am sure. The other differences I want to let lie as they are, take a pause, and think.

Sincerely, Arne.

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Arne Raeithel  
Universitaet Hamburg, FB Psychologie

**13.38. Date: Tue, 9 Nov 1993 12:48:05 -0800**

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>  
Subject: confusion over goals/objects  
To: xact@ucsd.edu

I see that I mis-edited my last message, so I am repeating it in the interests of clarity. My apologies for the duplication.

mike

Dear Xacters-

I, like Arne, feel that there is a lot to be digested in the Xact discussion on goals. But instead of pausing, I would like to get some help in reaching clarity on a crucial point that seems to be the source of confusion for (at least) English speakers who grapple with AT ideas. It is the relationship between goals and motives, or goals and objects.

Yesterday in our seminar we spent a LOT of time attempting to get straight about the action-goal, activity-motive/object distinction. We failed, despite the best efforts of Yrjo Engestrom and Victor Kaptelinin (who, I believe, disagree on other matters linked to the action-activity distinction). I was reinforced in my belief of the centrality of this issue for our discussions by Bonnie's notes this morning which seems to reflect the same difficulty.

level of action (individual) and object at the level of activity (supraindividual/societal) right?

Maybe I have misinterpreted Bonnie, but the problem of coming systematically to distinguish goal/motive action/activity remains as a difficult-to-recognize source of confusion in my thinking, and I believe the thinking and writing of others on xact (and for sure, in our local seminar). Help with this issue would be greatly appreciated.

mike

Michael Cole

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### **13.39. Date: Tue, 9 Nov 1993 23:13 EDT**

From: SERPELL <SERPELL@UMBC>  
Subject: Benign transmission of culture  
To: xclass@ucsd

Jay Lemke's "Educational Ideal" is "an adult sufficiently resourceful and "irresponsible" to assist in every way possible a small group of children to learn or to do absolutely anything they took it into their heads to learn or to do? Or a supportive community of adults? No curriculum. No goals. No limits."

This seems to me to treat a means as an end.

He defends this "ideal" against the charge that it "would lead to the fall of civilization in a single generation", on the grounds that learners are not "isolated individuals; it ignores that we are always powerfully enmeshed in social systems of practices that extend far beyond education."

This seems to me to equate education with schooling, and implicitly to suggest a deschooling agenda.

While I agree with the spirit of Jay's commitment to cultivating diversity in children's development, I see no value in banishing the accumulated wisdom of society from the resources on which adults may draw in the design of activities to cultivate development. The metaphor of re-invention for describing how children appropriate cultural ideas is just that: a metaphor. Likewise the maieutic conception of teaching derives its capacity to illuminate the pedagogical process from its bid to mollify the directiveness of more didactic forms of instruction. But to suppose that all we need do is stand back while children re-invent cultural wisdom is indeed irresponsible.

Critical and divergent thinking are no less "educational goals" than accumulation of facts or social conformity. They are just much harder to work towards consistently ! Responsible education by teachers in schools calls among other things for accountability to those systems in which the students are enmeshed, but that does not mean assuming that any system is as good as any other...

Ah well, the night grows long. Robert.

-----  
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**13.40. Date: Tue, 9 Nov 1993 08:46:38 -0100**

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)  
Subject: Goal-Talk and beyond  
To: xact@weber.ucsd.edu

Excuse me, please! The following message was written on Saturday, and sent with troubles, bounced back and resent without linends. So I hope it does it now. AL

>

>Gordon Wells writes:

>

>>Picking up Arne's earlier response, can't we allow that the goalposts in a

>>game of soccer are `real entitites', as is the target at which the archer  
>>aims? And isn't getting the ball between the posts or the arrow into the  
>>target the goal of the activity in a very `real' sense?  
>  
>And he adds a number of well designed examples of "real entities" as well as  
>"symbolic objects" that play a role, explicitly formulated or not, or are  
>"effective in directing behaviour".  
>  
>I agree, this is our ordinary language talk. I would even go further and say  
>that I would not at all care, whether such entities are real or symbolic, and  
>I would readily include the empty space between the goalposts to be a target  
>or goal to direct action towards. It also is a good tradition to strive  
>towards very abstract states, among them something called "eternal life", etc.  
>The latter examples with a non-real object (the space between, eternal  
>existence) might make my point perhaps clearer:  
>  
>As long as we use the term "goal" as an object designator, we run the risk of  
>concealing before ourselves that a goal is not a thing or event out there, but  
>a relation between two or more entities, one of them closer to the person  
>"having" the goal and the other in some way some "further away" or not  
>completely dependent on her. In Lewins term, a goal state is in effect a  
>system of valences, i.e. clearly a relational term. That is, in a chemical  
>analogy, a goal is an ion rather than an atom; and it must be an ion that fits  
>with an "ion" on the actor side. Our goal-talk is deeply Cartesian. It  
>presupposes a Subject opposed to an Object, and it inescapably must ask  
>questions of priority among the two.  
>  
>Secondly, that goal talk is usually strangely focussed on a single entity or  
>event and swerves attention from the field of other entities necessarily  
>involved. Say, having the goal of increasing cash flow of a company lets the  
>boss easily overlook in what way and extent other people are embroiled in the  
>process. Look at the social process in terms of goal-talk is probably directly  
>related to linearization our views and to instrumentalization of our fellow  
>people.  
>  
>Why do we find our goals to draw rather than to push us, Jozsef? We could  
>actually capitalize on the very trivial experience that is caught in a German  
>proverb translatable into: and firstly things turn out differently, and

>secondly than one thinks. Sure, desired states of affairs are future ones. But  
>goals imposed upon us by heteronomous instances certainly push us, not  
>seldom  
>enforced by all sorts of powers.  
>  
><<To fail to recognize the reality of human motivation may be dangerous.  
>Motivation and will afford people tremendous power. I think it important to  
>try to understand what motivates people rather than to assert that they  
>simply react to "a situation" and then make up some reasons for having done so  
>later.>>  
>  
>says Bonnie Nardi. Nobody said or implied such thing. But why, Bonnie, do you  
>point exclusively to people's own goals and forget about goals imposed and  
>enforced by others. I also would like to protest the interpretation, Gordon  
>Wells gives to Jay Lemkes question:  
>  
><<What evidence do we actually have that children learn better, es-  
>pecially that they learn better how to work on their own tasks,  
>or the tasks of groups which formulate their own tasks, when they  
>are taught by methods that work to keep them "on" a task which is  
>not theirs?>>,  
>  
>namely, that "it also seems to deny the value of any form of teacher organized  
>activity."  
>  
>Indeed, I would like to see the evidence. Of course, not in terms of  
>quantities of the learned, but in term of some quality. Perhaps of the kind  
>Alfred N. Whitehead had in mind when he mused: "The second-handedness of  
>most  
>people's experience is the reason for their mediocrity." I do not at all deny  
>that people in community need to take each other into task. But I would like  
>to see this placed under some kind of reciprocity principle. The term task is  
>another of those Cartesianese Trojan Horses. Are tasks, and especially  
>educational tasks, fulfilled when some goal is reached, when a solution is  
>found? How can we come to deem paths more important than goals?  
>  
>From this perspective, I find it desirable to try to replace goal-talk by more  
>realistic notions. "Strategy" and similar terms appear to go in the right



I would also welcome some expert give us a brief outline of the goal and object connex of notions in a spectrum of activity-action theory. Even if, what your seminar report relays, this will not be easy task.

When Anna Stetsenko a few weeks ago (I think it was in early September, unfortunately I cannot refind her message) wrote about the meaning ranges of some Russian terms like I, Me, Self, Society, Environemt etc. I thought I'd had to reread much of the translated literature, because the type of relational meaning she gave to such terms did not have really come through in my memory of my readings and a few sample checks swiftly confirmed this impression. This relates to both English and German transalations. Maybe some of the discrepancies are really simply terminological and therefore communicational or trans-cultural ones. -  
- Others are and should be real, especially those re theory and practice of the educational process; Eugene Matusow has brought that magnificently into words! That kind of tension between habits and reflexion are essential keep one's believes in scientific endeavors alive. Thanks a lot, Eugene!

Alfred E-mail on Internet: lang@psy.unibe.ch

Hope, one of my multiple postings of the same message finally arrived well and all others have been suitably deleted. Problems appear cleared now here. Until next time.

[next AL message](#)

### **13.42. Date: Tue, 9 Nov 1993 15:05:34 -0800**

From: nardi@taurus.apple.com (Bonnie Nardi)  
Subject: terminology problems  
To: xact@ucsd.edu

I think that Mike Cole has hit on a problem that needs addressing. I intended to distinguish between "object" and "goal" -- both in the activity theory sense -- but was using the word "goal" in the colloquial American way that I felt it was being used in the discussion (i.e., really motive/object). Therefore my choice of words had exactly the opposite effect intended.

I notice a hesitancy to adopt the the use of the word "object," perhaps because it means so many things in English, and leads to usages such as "object-oriented" which are truly overloaded, in the computational world at least.

I don't know what vocabulary we should standardize on, but perhaps those in the activity theory seminar could give this some thought.

I am still confused, with respect to the concept of object, at how differing objects form a connected web, and how that web can be used to define "an activity." It seems to me that though we can refer to a collective object, in many phenomena



that we would want to analytically demarcate as "an activity" there are differing objects among differing participants. I would like to know if anyone has expanded the idea of the web, or dealt with differing and perhaps conflicting objects as they come together in "an activity."

-----

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### **13.43. Date: Tue, 09 Nov 93 18:41:14 EST**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@cunyvm.bitnet>  
Subject: Genres and habitus  
To: Activity Theory Group <XACT@UCSD.BitNet>

Responding to Chuck Bazerman's interesting points about our conscious control of genre resources, I certainly agree that there are circumstances in which we *\*can\** exercise such control, but...

1) we still do not exercise it totally ad libitum, we make choices according to our preferences and dispositions, which are generally speaking class-gender-age-subculture (what I am lately calling "caste" for short) specific, ala Bourdieu's habitus

and

2) we often do not exercise conscious control in the ways that we could in Bazerman's account because just being able to use a genre does not mean we have an articulated model of what it is/ what we do, and likewise, while mastery of several somewhat similar genres (even dissimilar ones) *\*could\** lead us to a freer and more conscious control over choices, such multiple mastery does not necessarily (does not even I think very often) do so unless we have the articulated representational models of some sort (metagenre discourse practices), unless we learn or devise ways of connecting these to each other, and unless we do so in ways that make it seem appropriate to innovate or mix genre features in particular situations.

I don't deny the possibility of conscious creative use of genre potential, but I think that most often the closest people come to it is the general ubiquity of intertextuality in our meaning- making (i.e. unsystematic innovation).

JAY.

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### **13.44. Date: Tue, 09 Nov 93 18:35:26 EST**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@cunyvm.bitnet>

Subject: Goals as symbolic tools

To: Activity Theory Group <XACT@UCSD.BitNet>

Arne's suggestion that we regard Goals as tools, especially verbal tools, to help construct a continuity, at least for ourselves, in the directedness of our actions/activities, seems a reasonable one to me. Recognizing that the object-engagedness of actions, in a material interactionist sense (interactivity with the environment), is mainly also semiotically mediated (the meanings we give to objects and actions, and how we see their relations), then we can consider the internalized social language of goals and strategies as a specific special case of this more general phenomenon. We learn to talk about our actions in relation to hierarchies of goals and strategies, ends and means (in culture and even caste-specific ways). And we can use this kind of grouptalk and selftalk to keep ourselves and others "on task" -- even if this only means constructing a somewhat artificial continuity across time and action for what may be, from other points of view, rather differently (in fact, multiply) directed action.

As to the 10 Commandments, perhaps today for many they are Goals in some sense, but I rather think that originally they were taken as being Commands. They appear, and are often interpreted, as decontextualized and universal (in all circumstances, for all humankind, Thou Shalt ...), but I imagine that they were probably not so taken in their original contexts of production and reception. Christianity is a universalizing religion; ancient Judaism probably was not. These were commands to the Jews, specifically, and for the ordering of their new post-Exodus community particularly (a sort of Constitution? Mayflower Compact?), and perhaps may even have been regarded as valid only until further notice (since at the time Yahweh was expected to continue to be active in the world, was probably still considered part of the natural world, and certainly wasn't yet considered to stand outside of time and other such bizarre conceptual inventions of the later universalizing belief systems; they only wanted to conquer their Promised Land, not colonize the universe as the religions of later, more imperialist eras would).

JAY.

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**13.45. Date: Tue, 09 Nov 93 18:39:18 EST**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@cunyvm.bitnet>  
Subject: Development of Goal-symbols  
To: Activity Theory Group <XACT@UCSD.BitNet>

Mike Cole asks what the developmental angle on goals as symbolic tools vs. material objects might be. In one sense, it seems likely that we learn developmentally in some cultures to distinguish symbols from objects, so that we can symbolize the objects and use objects as symbols as well as using them as objects.

Probably early on in development, as possibly in the history of culture, these distinctions are not so clearcut. In particular, in early stages, distancing exists only in very reduced forms and contexts. As we learn to distinguish self and other, perhaps first socially, then materially (and \*this\* distinction is probably not so salient for the organism/persona so early either), object-goals (reach for the "thing") become possible and the distinction between action and intention becomes possible. Obviously there is a lot that many people have had to say about these matters in detail, but it is this sort of developmental issue that would seem to me to be relevant. The big problem is always using our highly differentiated (and culture-specific) adult categories to frame these developmental issues.

Another relevant aspect, raised I think by Matusov, and to which we all probably agree, is that language is not the only semiotic system that can be used in the functional self-presentation, maintenance, continuity of goals. And so, developmentally, we ought to be able to go back to a stage in which what we culturally as adults distinguish as language, vs. say complex interdependent schemas of sensorimotor action of other kinds that could operate semiotically, are not yet so distinguishable in the child. Here also is the point where the distinction between goal as object and goal as symbol is just coming into being, since the proto-semiotic stage is one where action=representation. We need more fully developed discourses about the common ("ancestral") elements of all the adult semiotic systems to even begin fooling ourselves that we can capture what it was like before we'd become what we are. (Ditto the semiotics of non-mammalian species generally, and of most of the "consciousness" of most mammals except for those we may have "colonized"/domesticated or those closest to our own lineage, e.g. primates).

"A mouse ceases to be a mouse the moment a single cat contemplates it, bearing within in itself the remembered taste of its last meal -- Feline de Saint-Exupery. ?? "

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### **13.46. Date: Tue, 09 Nov 93 18:43:43 EST**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@cunyvm.bitnet>

Subject: Stable goals

To: Activity Theory Group <XACT@UCSD.BitNet>

I'm glad Bonnie Nardi is arguing for the need of some notion like that of the traditional view of longterm, stable goals. It pushes me, having rejected this notion, to see what remains to be explained in other terms.

What I am rejecting is our reification of goals. At any particular moment (and on the human scale that's of the order of a second or two) the organism has to do work to maintain its existence, and the social persona (a nexus in a system of social practices and activities) has to be engaged in the work that helps to construct, for it and others, its continuity as being the same self. My rejection of stable goals is only part of a more profound rejection of the very assumption of the persistence of the self, of the inertia of "mind" conceived of as real in the sense we are used to for matter. Just as the organism, as a self-organizing dynamical system, must constantly work (interact physically with the environment, repeated at all the scales of its various constituent subsystems) to keep itself from dying and falling apart, so the interdependent and coupled semiotic practices by which our sense of subjective selfhood and continuity is maintained must do likewise (in part because materially and neurologically these are the same processes viewed differently in terms of function).

All continuity, external or internal, is, if not an illusion, at least a construction, an artifact of some specific doings -- and we need to understand those doings to understand what we call the "thing" that "has" continuity (chair, dog, self, goal). Continuity is constructed as part of the process of the construction of the "thing" itself as an element of our meaning systems.

We do not, of course, subjectively keep our "goals" continuously in consciousness. We rehearse or refresh them as occasion requires. In doing this we also construct, retrospectively, their continuity as part of our construction of our own continuity. Anyone who has seriously tried to reflectively and critically undertake autobiographical writing (for long periods of the lifespan) will understand how problematic this can be.

There is of course an inertia of sorts to selfhood, to personality, to attitudes, beliefs, dispositions. It is the material inertia of the body (itself quite dynamic), the kind of embodiment of habits and dispositions, of body hexis for example, which is culture/caste-specific, as I adapt it from Bourdieu. There are also continuities of

"interests" or "needs" which are also, and more obviously to us, continuities in our relations with the outside social-material environment: constructable continuities of our participation in the supersystem. So we do indeed live trajectories through the lifespace for which we and others can construct many such continuities. But it is only by knowing how we construct them, and what differences we must submerge in order to foreground similarity and continuity, that we can know critically the limits of the continuity, the degree to which the constancy of our deeply held beliefs may have been no constancy at all, but a radical progression that only seems to us a constancy.

Think of each moment of choice, each engagement in specific activity, over years, of the Resistance fighter, the U.R. station-master. How are they integrated into the category of "Resistance activity" or "U.R. activity" as opposed to not being seen as specifically activities of this category? How, on each occasion, is the commitment renewed, re-voiced? How do the notions of what X-activity is/can be, change? different activities coming to be seen, subsumed under the same great Goal? and how is each made to be seen as connected to that goal? How are these connections necessarily different each time? and how does the Goal itself, seemingly always the same, actually change, fill out, mature, shift, get redefined in the course of pursuing "it" through these activities?

JAY.

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JAY LEMKE.

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### **13.47. Date: Tue, 9 Nov 93 17:41:22 -0800**

From: ematusov@cats.UCSC.EDU

Subject: GI - overview

To: xact@ucsd.edu, xclass@ucsd.edu

I want to response on Mike Cole's appeal to clarify the terminology about goal (however, I am not an expert in the field of goal). I want to share my knowledge of a technique of how to deal with terminology issues that I "stole" from Barbara Rogoff. I noticed that each time when there is a terminology problem, she tries to substitute a term with a question.

This is my attempt:

Goal: What do people try to accomplish in the activity?

Motive: Why do people involve in the activity?

Talking about goal, I see the problem not in terminology itself but in separation of what can be called goal as a description and goal as a phenomenon. The goal as a description helps us, researchers and rank people, to create a holistic picture of the activity. In the contrast, the goal as a phenomenon orients us toward notion of guidance. Now, let's back to Rogoff's inquiry technique.

The goal as a description: What is the direction of the activity?

The goal as a phenomenon: What guides the activity?

To illustrate the difference between guiding and describing, consider the formula of gravity discovered by Newton. When a stone falls down from a table on the floor, the gravity formula describes but not guides stone's movement. However, when a green computer spot "falls" from the top to the bottom of the computer screen in a computer emulation, the formula of gravity not only describes but actually guides the spot's movement.

Another example comes from Marx. Marx argued that the difference between a bee and an architect is not in the final product of their activity but in the fact that even the worst architect has ideal plan and goal that guides his activity unlike the most skillful bee.

It appears that Marx set a very simple test for deciding the presence of goal-directed activity: if there is an ideal plan in advance, then there is a goal. Moreover, it seems that any goal-directed activity has to have a three-step sequence: setting a goal (or a problem), making a plan, and, finally, implementing the plan with necessary adjustments to circumstances.

The problem with that model is in its dualism between thought and action. The dualism between thought and action leads to a tacit assumption of thoughtful but action-less homunculus in our heads that directs our body-marionette. Hegel in philosophy and Kohler in psychology (in his brilliant experiments with apes in 10s and 20s) demonstrated that actions can be planful and thoughtful immediately without any preexisted non-action mediators. There we are! It sounds like we are back to the problem. However, Kohler introduced the concept of mediated action (that Vygotsky borrowed from him and well-developed in his sociohistorical theory) that allows to discriminate planful (Kohler used also the term "intelligent") and planless actions. In brief, when an ape starts using a stick to reach a banana or a dog runs around a barrier to retrieve a bone (like in Kohler's experiments) then there is evidence of goal-directed activity. According to Kohler and then Vygotsky, only mediated action frees animal (or human) from "being a slave of his visual field."

Now I want to skip a few points developed by Leont'ev (e.g., a point that, under some conditions, a mediated action can become automatized and, thus, ceases to

be playful and goal- directed) to go directly to the issues of emergent goals and a sociocultural nature of goals.

If we assume after Kohler and Vygotsky, that mediated action constitutes goal, then introduction of a new mediated action in the activity transforms the goal! In joint activity, introduction of a new mediated action becomes a communicational problem for the participants because, otherwise, the mediated action would be mediated only for one particular individual and the activity cease to be fully joint. Thus, transformation of the goal in joint activity requires communication between the participants. But, what is communication if not a co- constructed mediated action?! Now we are at the final point that I want to make:

In joint activity, communication shapes (I hate this word!) transformation of the goal.

Eugene Matusov.

University of California at Santa Cruz.

P.S. By "communication" I mean any type communication including non-verbal, and even one-sided (like reading a book or observing).

### **13.48. Date: Wed, 10 Nov 1993 07:51:24 -0800**

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>  
Subject: shapes/provides medium for  
To: xact@ucsd.edu

Thanks for your comments on the goal/motive question, Eugene. I need to print out that message and a lot of the other ones in order to get my thoughts about them straight.

One possible terminological change that might help you with "shapes" (as in communication shapes transformation of goals). Perhaps if you said that communication serves as a medium of goal transformation in joint activity it would help?).

mike

Michael Cole

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### **13.49. Date: Wed, 10 Nov 1993 13:36:11 -0800**

From: Ritva Engestrom <rengestr@weber.ucsd.edu>  
Subject: goal & object

To: xact@ucsd.edu

I like to join to the brainworking for the concepts of 'goal' and 'object'. Partly because I have contributed to the mess around these concepts at the CHAT-class by emphasizing the difference between them and its methodological relevance. I will raise up only one point which I think has not yet been discussed (or maybe the whole discussion at xact has started with that notion, then I am sorry about returning to the starting point).

Jay Lemke in his last message discusses continuity and discontinuity very interestingly. He relates the goals to the continuity by saying "we construct their (goals') continuity as part of our construction of our own continuity". After that he turns to the notion of inertia "there is of course inertia" of sorts to selfhood, personality, body (itself quite dynamic). I think here we start to approach the area of concept of object. 'Object' relates to discontinuity. Objects have their own internal life and coherency (in many cases social-dynamic) which actually, like Arne has written (in Activity Theory as a Foundation for Design) constitutes a counter-process in the process of action. In other words, although objects are motives of activities (or direct the activity) they also are discontinuities of subjects.

You might hold that as the developmental (individual and social) tension in activities. And that is also the point where we need Vygotskian concept of mediation. Like Eugene Matusov shows us Marx's example about the difference between a bee and a architect (goal- directed activity) does not help us in goal-object problem.

F.ex. in traditional craftwork object's own properties are concretely participating (or counteracting) in the process. You have to study and know something about them, traditionally it has happened by experience. You cannot mould the pottery according your goal or aim (alone) without adjusting the goal to the known properties of your object. That is maybe a part of what we call process of goal formation. And maybe that is one reason to say that object is included in the concept of goal. In this transformation of concepts, however, starting to use 'goal' instead of 'object' I think we lose the discontinuity-relationship between subject and object. I want to emphasize that in my example the 'object' is in material form only for the simplicity because other kinds of objects (like at school, at play, at court, at medical consultation, or in the goal-formation institution at these settings etc.) are already more complicated and require research as such 'what is the object of a activity'. But there is already this kind of research available in Activity Theory. I don't want to go here to the social construction relationship between subject and object because I think it does not change the relationship in question.

My conclusion point is that we have been emphasizing the issue of motive and directness in searching for differences between goal and object. But as we have seen in xact discussion the colloquial american way to use 'goal' implies that kind



of power of directness. My question is: how 'goal' relates to the discontinuity between subject and object, to the notion of counter-process?

Ritva Engestrom

Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition (LCHC)

University of California, San Diego

**13.50. Date: Thu, 11 Nov 1993 09:33 EST**

From: WPENUEL@vax.clarku.edu

Subject: Definitions and goals

To: xclass@weber.ucsd.edu

While the group is considering coming to terms with terms, I wonder if we might lose the concept of "mediation" or "mediatedness" in action without the concept of goal as guiding activity. It makes little sense to talk about someone using a tool unless that tool functions in relation to some act that we can distinguish from mere motion. Similarly, I am puzzled by the use of the word "strategy" in the absence of some telos (whether emergent or superordinate) that the strategy is meant to accomplish.

To distinguish action from motion or behavior, the notion of goal is essential. The example from Marx is critical here. If we don't talk about purpose and goal, then all we have is a Cartesian universe with billiard balls in motion or the behaviorist's world of predictable responses.

Perhaps someone could clarify what "mediation" and "tool" would mean without the notion of purpose?

Bill Penuel

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**13.51. Date: Thu, 11 Nov 1993 11:15:42 -0500 (EST)**

From: Jozsef A Toth <jtoth+@pitt.edu>

Subject: What are goals for?

To: xact@ucsd.edu

I'm borrowing the subject header of this message from the Agre & Chapman paper: "What are plans for? What I say below is from the perspective of having recently converted from the AI/Cog Sci Establishment (AICSE) world view of things to a more AT-oriented view. Although I am still in a slowly annealing flux regarding

my interpretations of what is "out there" and what is "under the skull", I think there are some interesting notions regarding goals/plans/objects/actions/activity/etc. that need to be teased out.

#### The Accepted View:

First, the AICSE world view, beginning with Simon & Newell postulated that human behavior and reasoning is goal-directed. That is, humans are constantly being barraged with goals that at first, are encountered externally. E.g., "given x, y, & z: find (or prove) goal a". Such variables  $\langle x, y, z, a \rangle$ , in the AICSE world view, are postulated to first exist externally, but then are internalized and dealt with in the cognitive architecture; presumably in a symbolic fashion. So in this framework, goals reside both externally and are encoded internally. In the course of moving from the givens to the goal, the human compares his/her current state (external and internal) with the goal state and takes the appropriate causal actions to achieve the goal. I use the term "causal" in a Newtonian sense which is typically of a cause-effect nature. The tasks on which subjects worked, not suprisingly, were goal-oriented tasks such as Logic proofs, Geometry, chess, Physics and so forth---I will come back to the nature of such tasks, and how it might be confused with the cognitive architecture, later. McCarthy and Hayes, as well as others, had different spins on this notion, in which the goal might be de-emphasized, but the notion of a causal action, internal-external correspondence, and so forth, remained intact. Moreover, such cognitivistic architectures maintained an internal-external correspondence posture (dualism?) in which encoded internal symbols represented, (i.e., as Bickhard argues, "stood in for"), external entities, including objects, events and so forth. The wide appeal with such an approach bet on the (unfulfilled) hope that such concepts would satisfy both electromechanical (robot, computer) and human theories of intelligence in one grand architecture (cf. Newell's last (1991) book "Unified Theories of Cognition").

#### The Rebellion, and Activity Theory to the Rescue:

Unfortunately, this internal-external correspondence approach was, and still is, riddled with problems and intractabilities such as the symbol-grounding, frame and humunculous problems. However, the Establishment simply chose to explain away, and ignore these problems---usually arguing that Logicians would eventually solve them. Fortunately, in certain domains such as planning, such intractabilities could not be ignored, nor are they solvable. The standard Establishment approach had been to hand-craft static predictable worlds. When a mechanistic planner had to reason about an uncertain, unpredictable world, the internal-external correspondence view of intelligence fell apart. There is no known way to maintain all the various combinatorics that result from changes in the external world. Mathematically, Chapman demonstrated this in 1987.

Thus, what Agre, Chapman, Brooks, Rosenschein and others did, in their own different ways, was to instead focus on the interactions between the organism

and its environment. As opposed to the Establishment view, which atomized organism and environment, the "Situating Action" (SA) people as they have come to be called (not that I like it, since action can connote causality and some SA-ers are acausal instead treated organism-environment relationships as an unseparable, indivisible unit of analysis. My treatment thus far, is entirely in accordance with what Wertsch discusses in the Intro. of "Voices of the Mind"; but instead, he uses Piaget's schemas as an instance of the Establishment. Moreover, he also cites Behaviorism, in which, on the spectrum of organism-environment, the unit of analysis was the stimuli that occurred in the environment and the overt responses observed by the organism (some argue that cognitivism is simply the same Behaviorism wine that has been corked in a new bottle). Thus, the intractabilities I mentioned earlier were in most cases either attenuated or eliminated. For instance, such computational entities could now "plan" their way through dynamic, unpredictable worlds.

However, Establishment terms such as "goal", "plan", "action", "cause", and even "time" now took on new (or one could even argue, defunct) meanings in this new framework which did not readily support such notions. For example, electromechanical instances of "Situating Action" (SA) concepts focused on the here-and-now and what to do next. Thus, as a scientific observer, the interpretation might be that such a reasoning agent is performing the Establishment goal-directed behavior along the dimension of time, when in reality, it is doing nothing of the sort. In short, such ascriptions are 'emergent', rather than intrinsic to the reasoning architecture. Sadly enough, it is very difficult to get an Establishment person to comprehend these salient differences, let alone, get him/her to understand a property such as emergence.

Moreover, I feel and as I promised earlier, Establishment architectures of intelligence are inextricably tied-up in the structure of the tasks and ensuing computational simulations that have been primarily used to support such hypotheses. For instance, there usually exists a suspicious isomorphism, as far as I am concerned, between the external syntax and causalities inherent to the task and the resulting abstracted, internal representations that are postulated to swim around "inside the head"---hence the charge that this is simply a repackaging of Behaviorism; which ironically, is what the Establishment sought to unseat in the 1950s. W.J. Clancey eloquently refers to problems of this entire enterprise, and perhaps to the study of intelligence, as the frame-of-reference problem; referring to the scientist, the intelligent phenomenon and the intelligence (or explanation thereof) that is abstracted as the result of the interaction between the two. I've provided similar descriptions but along different scientific dimensions, more congruent with the properties that Wertsch justifies as the need for an AT scientific frame-of-reference.

The work in SA is far from done: issues such as learning (development), the maintenance of such agent-environment interactions in "long-term memory", and adaptation to novel situations are a few of the major obstacles to be overcome.

Finally, My Point and Thus, My Questions:

For those of you who have hung in this far, I find the symbol/goal/object distinctions being discussed in xact extremely enlightening, but also kind of confusing. First, has AT settled, or even agreed upon, a uniform or even loosely structured scientific framework? As I demonstrated in my Establishment/SA explication, a term such as "goal" in one framework does not readily share an analogy in the other. Do similar frame-of-reference problems exist in AT? Is AT truly a genetic approach (i.e., onto, micro, phylo, socio, epi) that seeks to understand "intelligence" in a certain way through mutually agreeable practices and methods? And as Bill Penuel just mentioned how do the notions of "mediation" and "tool" fit into all of this.

In the many xact messages on the topic of goals, symbols and so forth, I have witnessed interpretations that are (1) external, (2) focus on the interactions between organism-environment and (3) internal. Although I'm not sure if (3) has been articulated, I have a hard time understanding how something like hunger could ever give rise to "goals" that haven't at first, originated internally.

A group of natives in South America comes to mind. There is a canopy-type tree that bears a delicious fruit but is inaccessible to the foragers since the bark of the tree is protected by prickly spines. To get around this barrier, what the natives have accomplished is to plant smooth-bark trees directly next to the potentially-painful, prickly-barked tree and in a few years are able to climb the smooth-bark trees (with a harness-type tool that is very similar to what telephone co. pole climbers use) to get at the fruit. Is this behavior goal-directed? Certainly, one can articulate that getting at the fruit was the goal, hence the elaborate solution which led to the planting and climbing of smooth-barked trees. What kinds of "goals" have been pursued and/or met in this lovely scenario?---or---from a genetic perspective, is such behavior strictly a series of adaptive behaviors that accommodate a new situation? If we know from the foibles of the Establishment that goal-directed behavior has so far, been unprovable, in which directions can we turn (as SA has done) to explain such phenomena?

Joe

Jozsef A. Toth

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**13.52. Date: Thu, 11 Nov 1993 08:31:23 -0800**

From: Mike Cole <mcole@WEBER.UCSD.EDU>

Subject: mediation

Cc: xact@ucsd.edu

Bill- I am no longer sure who has said precisely what in this discussion, which is going on simultaneously in xact, xclass, and even xlhc (Kutti's note, for example). I will cc this to xact, despite the overlap it will cause; this may be the first case where there was so much discussion of an issue at lower levels in different conferences such that it becomes a real problem. Hmmmm, wonder what will happen.

Anyway, you have touched now on the reasons why our course here at UCSD on Activity and Communication began with the concept of mediation. To begin with, a little wordplay. Note that the antonym of direct is indirect. A synonym for direct is immediate. And the antonym for immediate? MEDIATED. Therefore, the idea of indirectness is the core of the idea of mediated.

A mediator is an artifact appropriated by the individual that is used to guide behavior. From their earliest writings, the cultural-historical psychologists insisted that both the "direct" and "indirect" relations of individual to the world exist in dynamic relation to each other; this new structural characteristic of behavior was initially called " the cultural habit of behavior.

behavior." I think it is an alternative name for the process that Dewey says gives rise to experience.

The artifacts that mediate human activity are deeply saturated with telos, human telos from the past which is mediating actions which are themselves constituted by and constituting the systems of activity which unite the individual and social sides of human experience..

In short, if this line of reasoning is worthwhile, it may be impossible to have goals without mediation.

Note that if one approaches the problem in this way, the issue of whether goals and objects are material or ideal disappears; they are ineluctably both material and ideal.

Thoughts for a thursday morning, evoked by your message. Thanks.

Mike

Michael Cole

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**13.53. Date: Thu, 11 Nov 93 22:35:41 -0800**

From: ematusov@cats.UCSC.EDU

Subject: Goal is action

To: xact@ucsd.edu, xclass@ucsd.edu

Dear colleagues, I am glad that our VERY interesting discussion of the concept of goal gives all of us opportunity to revisit this difficult concept, which is a core of sociocultural approach. I want to share some knowledge that is, I think, relevant for the discussion.

In response on my recent message on role of mediation in goal, Bill Penuel wrote:

>While the group is considering coming to terms with terms, I wonder if we  
>might lose the concept of "mediation" or "mediatedness" in action without the  
>concept of goal as guiding activity. It makes little sense to talk about  
>someone using a tool unless that tool functions in relation to some act that  
>we can distinguish from mere motion.

I agree with Bill that mediation (that is broader than tool using, by the way) does not exist without a goal. But I do not agree that goal precedes mediation nor it follows mediated action. Roughly speaking, goal IS mediated action. Thanks to Mike Cole for his wonderful reference to Dewey about teleology of mediation. Speaking more precisely, goal, intelligence, mediated action, planning, self-regulation are different aspects of one phenomenon. What is that phenomenon?

Joe Toth has started bringing historical context in our discussion. I want to continue his endeavor. I agree with Joe that we should go back to behaviorists to understand the concept of goal. Behaviorists struggled with mentalism. In my view, after so called "cognitive revolution," mentalism monopolized psychology. I feel a great respect to behaviorism for challenging mentalism. Behaviorists raised a very important question about whether description of behavior corresponds its structure. Let's me illustrate their argument with my favorite example of a falling stone. The fact that the formula of gravity wonderfully describes and predicts actual falling the stone does not mean that the stone possess the formula. (Now recall information-processing theory with its assumption that individual possesses scripts of behavior!) Behaviorists argued that even if we see behavior that has a clear direction, function, and good adaptation, it does mean that it necessary is goal- directed because it might be environment-directed.

On the other side of the Atlantic, behaviorists' challenge of core psychological concepts including goal was taken seriously by German Gestalt psychologists. They agreed with American behaviorists in two points. First, activity without goal can be functional, adaptive, and directive. Second, activity without goal is fully directed by the environment. However, unlike behaviorists, Gestalt psychologists argued that goal (intellect, planning, and so on) does exist as a phenomenon. Also, they split the notion of environment in two notions: physical environment and psychological environment. The latter type of environment was called "psychological field" (or in Gibsonian terms "affordances"). It is psychological field that is fully responsible for the control of an organism in an activity without goal.

Moreover, in accord with behaviorists, Gestalt psychologists insisted that all behavior is directed by psychological field ( J.J.Gibson later re-introduced their arguments using his term of "affordances").

What is goal then? Goal is not direction of behavior, it is not function, it is not adaptation. How can the phenomenon of goal exist if all behavior controls by environment (psychological environment -- I should add)? The Gestalt psychologists' answer was that the phenomenon of goal is in a phenomenon of re-organization of individual's psychological field through special action that they called "mediated action"! Through this mediated action a stick that was a part of physical environment, unrelated to ape's attempts to reach a banana through bars of a cage, becomes a part of the ape's psychological field linking with the banana. As before, the ape's behavior is controlled by the psychological field, but now it is a different field. Through mediated action individual regulates him/herself, changing own psychological field is self-regulation.

Gestalt psychologists designed and performed a lot of experiments with animals (I guess, to "bit" behaviorists in their "territory") to demonstrate and study the difference between activity with goal and activity without goal. Let me give a few examples. A hen was placed behind a wall shaped like the letter "C". In the middle of the wall there was a window so the hen could see a food. But the window was small enough that the hen could not get through. After a few unsuccessful attempts to get through the window, the hen got frustrated it began moving chaotically inside the wall with increasing amplitude, time to time looking through the window at the food. Eventually, it left the wall but still moving chaotically. If the hen saw the food, it got it. Analyzing the hen's behavior, Kohler stated that hen's activity is functional, adaptive, and directive; but, it is completely under power of the hen's psychological field organized around the food.

In the contrast, a dog in the same situation behaved differently. At the beginning, dog's behavior was similar. The dog also made a few attempts to get through the window and then got frustrated wondering inside the wall and watching at the food. However, after a while, the dog suddenly turned back to the window and went around the wall directly to the food. Kohler stressed two moments here: the latter dog's behavior was holistic ("gestalt") in time and space (i.e., trajectory) and the dog moved in the direction of the opposite to the desired object (i.e., food). This behavior was directed by new re-organized psychological field structured around the wall not around the food. Re-organization of psychological field is mediated action (or as Kohler called it "round-about action"). It might or might not involve operating with other objects (tools) but, in any case, it includes new elements of physical environment. Also, it always involves moving away from desired object, i.e., detour. It sounds paradoxically, but evidence of the presence of a goal is not in individual's moving toward the desired object but

moving away from the object (i.e., detouring).

Kurt Lewin shot a film of a 3-year old girl who could not sit down on a stone she liked because to sit she had to turn back to the stone. She tried again and again but in vain. This movie was seen by Vygotsky who made further conceptual steps and defined self-regulation through mediated action. But what is more important (at least for me) is that Vygotsky raised a question of how one individual can communicate mediated action to another individual. How can goal be communicated among individuals? Or, in terms of gestalt psychology, how can one individual change psychological field of another individual?

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Oops! I better stop here because it is another (very interesting!) topic that I would call "Social origin of goal in joint activity." I think I wrote enough to produce confusion without introducing a new topic.

In brief:

Goal is re-organization of psychological field through mediated ("detouring") action to master own behavior toward desired object.

Eugene Matusov.

University of California at Santa Cruz.

### **13.54. Date: Thu, 11 Nov 1993 23:34:17 -0800**

From: Yrjo Engestrom <yengestr@weber.ucsd.edu>  
Subject: Re: What are goals for?  
To: xact-request@weber.ucsd.edu, xact@ucsd.edu

Joe Toth asked: "Has AT settled, or even agreed upon, a uniform or even loosely structured scientific framework?"

The answer is yes; and there is a tradition of fairly intensive theoretical and empirical research that spans over some 60 years - although much of the literature does not exist in English.

I have for some time had the somewhat disturbing feeling that many of those who write about AT have not even read the basic texts that are readily available in English. I would recommend that you start with A. N. Leont'ev's book 'Activity, Consciousness, and Personality' (Prentice-Hall, 1978). It would be wise to continue with the volume 'The Concept of Activity in Soviet Psychology', edited by J. Wertsch (Sharpe, 1981) and another, actually much earlier book by Leont'ev, namely 'Problems of the Development of the Mind' (Progress, 1981).

Yrjo Engestrom



LCHC at UCSD

**13.55. Date: Fri, 12 Nov 1993 13:57:13 +0100 (MET)**

From: raeithel@rzdspc1.informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)  
Subject: Objects and Motives  
To: xact@ucsd.edu,  
xclass@ucsd.edu

Dear Friends of the XFAMILY,

this is a sunny Hamburg morning, streams of people outside under the rails of the Hochbahn go look, and buy their meals on the Ise-Markt, or some flowers for Grandma and the afternoon visit to the UKE (university hospital Eppendorf). I am sitting before the PowerBook screen, taking a day off after having delivered an important lecture (important for my own position)...

I was rethinking how this year's threads in the xfamily (more exactly: in xlchc, xact, xorgan = all that I get) developed. In early September I had sent out a rather depressed, therefore realistic, picture of what part of the possibilities of this strange medium "e-listing" where actually to be had there and then (over xorgan, "A view from Hamburg").

We have all seen since: the xfamily taking one qualitative leap after another, and the present discussion on Goals, Objects and Purposes is the best one I have ever seen in any 10 days that I can recall...

Therefore, I will try to explain my personal view of

\* the category of activity

\* as mediating between the subjective and the objective "pole"

---(also called dynamical "moment", not yet temporal "moment"!

---in the Hegelian and Marxian traditions)

\* of the "unity" of humans (a diverse, yet unifiable process)

\* with a myriad of counter-processes.

Activity mediates (is the soul of) the whole web of transactional processes

\* between humans

\* and their LifeWorld.

---(Lebenswelt, the humanly possible version of an Umwelt, see Uexk:ull,

----several phenomenologists and anthropologists,

----and in psychology: Kurt Lewin).

It is not easy to see this, because it pre-supposes having done a rational de-centring on human affairs. Humans talk and think "about" Humans in thus reflecting the dialectical process between those poles, there is no way around this self-distancing move. But people differ in how to do it with feeling and with reason, and especially they differ in answering: To what end it should this lead ? What is it good for ?

Goal talk, on the other hand, is centred talk. A "we" must be defined, a social subject or community, for goals to be able to ground the sense that the individual actor finds in pursuing them. Actions and the goals by which they may be distinguished from each other (yielding types of action) cannot be divorced from the actors that keep hold of "their" goals. Actors use the (mostly discursive) symbols as direction reminding tools (Jay Lemke said this very succinctly) to hold steady their intended course of action.

Activities (patterns of transaction between humans and lifeworlds) are held together by greater powers than what intending individuals and the best means for remembering can muster together. They reproduce and proliferate independently of individual actors (as an example, think of the activity of a horseshmith shop in medieval England -- many movies exist to help you do that). The stream of "objects" produced, transformed, and re-produced by such "shop systems" or other communities of practice is intended to be exchanged with other goods from other shops or communities, therefore all objects have "value" (two forms may be distinguished: abstract exchange value, in \$\$ preferably, and use value for the one who takes the good into his or her or their possession).

To produce value in a certain material form is the motive of all human activities. This is Alexei Leont'ev's discovery (= unveiling) of the "external" determinant of human conduct. "Material" in the first sentence of this paragraphs centrally means "bodily realized", "living", "soulful", "sensous", as well as "made of stuff", "molded into a form", "educated into a certain function". Thus the motive is "external" only to human individual actors, but never external to the unit of humans with lifeworld. This could not be the case, it is simply impossible because of the genetic path of developing these categories (also called: it is ruled out under our axiomatic definitions).

The really hard problem, after this easy flow through a dialectical discourse about God (das verhimmelte Gemeinwesen) and the World, is for today's researchers to distinguish types of activities and their corresponding array of objects-with-value (or

-with-Quality, as defined by Robert Pirsig in his soul-moving novel "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance").

I cannot solve this problem in general. Nobody can. But in the discussion on distinguishing the activity level and the action level (a raging debate this is, for nearly twenty years in my own experience) some clear markers have surfaced to stake out the claims a bit better. The following cannot be exhaustive therefore, it just lists what seems to me important now, and here. (The Ise-Markt is more quiet meanwhile, will close down in 90 minutes).

(1)

Any activity system exhibits closure; there is a definite self-defined borderline, across which goods are exchanged by \$\$ value or comparable symbolized media of social exchange (Marxist social theory, I have not read enough of English language literature to be confident in picking out individual books or authors). There are other interesting borderlines, e.g. take the rule of Ed Hutchins: "Draw the limits where the propagation rate of symbolic states across media is lowest".

This kind of closure I have called "reproductive closure" in my 1981 dissertation (out of print meanwhile, have to write it anew anyway).

In many cases there is also a corresponding closure of the "shop talk" of the community members; this would then be a criterion to speak of a special "semiosphere" of that community (see Lotman's article in Soviet Psychology vol 27, 1981).

(2)

Each community of practice or closed activity system (open to exchange of goods, but otherwise self-reproducing) uses a pattern of operational means, often quite "sociosyncratic", i.e., seeming queer and non-rational to outsiders who come as alien observers first time to see, "how they do it differently than we".

The operational means are another level of human social conduct entirely. If we draw lines from actors to the means they are using in an image (or comic strip) of the ongoing actions, these lines go "down" and "inside"; in the following sense:

\* down in a goal hierarchy of "command" of "higher centers",

and "autonomous realization" by lower "functional systems";

\* inside as regards the awareness of a personal or social actor,

less well observed and observable by her, him or them, more

and more trustable, intuitive and natural.

Means reproduce and proliferate independently from both the actors that deploy them in their course, and the activity systems (a fortiori, simply because this level is further off, in the sense of "upper" and "outer").

Only in rare cases is it possible to characterize an activity system by exclusive use of certain (then non-proliferating) means. These are exactly the rare cases that money-capital is hungry for. Patents (as explained in the paper that Chuck Bazerman offered recently) are a societal tool to make this situation stable -- long enough for innovations to get a chance against the overweight of established market powers.

(3)

You may ask actors (persons, too, but preferably groups) for what their motives and objects are. A good lead question would be: What needs are fulfilled with the goods that you are making?

Leont'ev explains (Yrjo Engestrom has given references late last night) that a full personal motive is generated (or emerges by itself) WHEN A NEED MEETS AN OBJECT (or vice versa).

To be sure, the observer may see objects and motives where the natives don't see them. This is a good sign! -- for progress of research. The natives might learn more of "what makes them tick", and the observers some of the shortcomings of their eye-glasses and measurement techniques...

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Ise-Markt is closed now. If you didn't buy any of my quality goods, it is your fault, although you might have good reason for not doing so.

Cheers to California,

Arne.

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**13.56. Date: Fri, 12 Nov 1993 12:11:28 -0500**

From: cb47@prism.gatech.edu

Subject: Re: Goal is action

To: xact@ucsd.edu, xclass@ucsd.edu

>Oops! I better stop here because it is another (very interesting!)

>topic that I would call "Social origin of goal in joint activity." I

>think I wrote enough to produce confusion without introducing

>a new topic.

>

>In brief:

>

>Goal is re-organization of psychological field through mediated

>("detouring") action to master own behavior toward desired

>object.

Thanks, Eugene, for your elegant summary of the "psychological" issue of the emergence of goal in an individual's psychological field. But where you leave off is precisely at the moment of emergence of goals on the socio-cultural field, the beginning of history, orientation towards each other in the satisfaction of personal need, and then the emergence of group need, the emergence of the symbolic and the cultural form.

So I look forward to your account of "Social origin of goal in joint activity." And we might think also of the "detouring" of the individual into socio-cultural behavior, with the maintenance still of individual need and orientation, positioning the individual on the social field--and the at times identification of the self with participation on the social field. Think of the poor hen's problems raised up one step--the fox who can find the door to the henhouse, but does not know the socially organized ways of acquiring hens that do not lead to the farmer coming after you with a shotgun. This is now at the level of activity systems. But this is also with awareness of the tensions and contradictions always latent among the three levels of field--physical, psychological, and social--tensions that may lead to pain but may also lead to innovation.

We perhaps might also contemplate other fields of even higher order, such as symbolic or literate fields, which both reflect back on the previous three fields and provide guidance for our movements with them, but which themselves become new fields for our own participation and self-actualization, need fulfillment and higher order need creation. And as with the previous fields, it brings about restructuring of each of the prior fields. Literacy in its many varieties helps to restructure societies and activity systems in many potential ways (though clearly not one monolithic way). Literacy also restructures the cognitive in potentially many different ways, depending on the literacy and the psychological field, and its placement in the type of social field. And of course material action is reshaped by all.

It is perhaps at these higher, symbolic orders that new kinds of interim stabilizations are made possible--such as the recognizably generic (my hobby-horse) or the commonly shared semiotic field (Jay Lemke's) or the institutional, etc. Arne's comments this morning about my paper are here germane.

"Only in rare cases is it possible to characterize an activity system  
"by exclusive use of certain (then non-proliferating) means. These are  
"exactly the rare cases that money-capital is hungry for. Patents (as  
"explained in the paper that Chuck Bazerman offered recently) are  
"a societal tool to make this situation stable -- long enough for  
"innovations to get a chance against the overweight of established  
"market powers.

But I would differ, concerning the rarity. While on the social field means proliferate, the emergence of the public symbolic provides objects for the orientation of the individual and opportunities for negotiation of the communal. So that individuals whose ambitions or goals or desires for participation have extended to the social (that is whose individual psychological fields not only incorporate a perception of the social as an opportunity to satisfy the individual needs but also a perception of the self as a part of the social field, and therefore having needs for integration in various ways into the social field) --those certain individuals will be actively attracted to incorporating the symbolic that provide means for negotiation of the social and the establishing of certain stabilities, allowing for regularized social satisfactions. One of those symbolic systems which have produced a certain degree of negotiation and stability and therefore targets of ambition has been that of money and capital. It has unfortunately involved reductions of many other symbolic opportunities (Adam Smith is very interesting on this--I have written a piece unpacking Smith's social rhetoric and his project of social organization of psychologically diverse, idiosyncratic people (Humean humans) through the common symbolic of money). But other forms of symbolic sociocultural integration remain and are attached to recognizable discursive/symbolic systems of a relatively stable nature existing in the world (although again they all these days have to make some accommodation to the dominant common currency of finance).

The point of all this is that the emergence of a symbolic provides strong attractors for the behavior, goals, desires, ambitions or actions of individuals and groups. While capitalists may seek the special opportunities of patents to create new value in the market system, everyone these days has to go after a paycheck (or pay the other prices that the market economy elicits for non-participation). And a large bank account (or tenure) is a strong indicator of certain kinds of personal security and stability of life arrangements, that facilitate other securities and stabilities.

in the united states today, because of the many social, symbolic and institutional orders that almost all of us regularly orient to or which orient towards us and demand our attention, most of us live pretty orderly lives--even those whose lives

suffer disruption or apparent personal disorder--for those disruptions are played out against only slowly evolving social fields, even though we might like at times those fields to evolve much more rapidly towards the kinds of symbolic commitments certain groups of us might prefer.

So we move from hens and chicken feed to Perot and NAFTA debates.

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**13.57. Date: Fri, 12 Nov 1993 09:08:15 -0800**

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>  
Subject: How about publishing??  
To: xact@ucsd.edu

Dear Xacters-- As Arne noted in his message this morning, the recent discussion has been especially rich. And, as oyu know from an earlier message, next spring marks the start up of Mind, Culture, and Activity as a journal.

The journal includes a section of "less formal" papers that is intended to continue the tradition of the LCHC newsletter. In this connection, I think it would be an EXCELLENT contribution if some oneS of you would collaborate to create a "polylog about goals" drawing upon the many contributions to this discussion, for publication in MCA. What is needed is at least one volunteer, but my guess is that if three/four Xactors acted, it might produce the optimally interesting product. This article would count as a real, refereed article on all the associated vitas, c'est entendue. :-))

Whadya think?

mike  
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**13.58. Date: Fri, 12 Nov 93 23:18:27 EST**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@cunyvm.bitnet>  
Subject: Goals, etc.  
To: Activity Theory Group <XACT@UCSD.BitNet>

I don't know if Eugene Matusov's post answers the questions people have had about goals and objects in AT, but I certainly like most of what he has to say. In particular I think it is very important to realize that the notion of the "ideal plan", or internal representation of the desired final state (as it was put before) makes sense only in a model that separates thought from action, as our traditional folk-model does, and also, I believe as many AI models do. The AI models, like the folk-model in its modern form, separate thought from action, or planning from execution, goals from implementation, because they reflect a class model: managers set goals, workers implement them. To me this is one more example of how modern ideologies re-write the social into the cognitive, thus disguising the social.

If goals are constituted in and through action, as a dimension of the semiotic mediateness of action, then, as Matusov seems to say, they must always be reformed during action (i.e. "implementation"), and they are goals for a group only when there is communication during activity to co-ordinate individual participation, including individual senses of the meaning and goal of the activity. How could a manager ever command others to work toward HIS (usually) goal, if we all accepted that (1) the goal would evolve during "implementation", and (2) it could remain "his" goal only if he participated in that implementation, in the course of which it would wind up being equally everyone's goal?

Now, in fact, I don't believe that people truly share goals even in joint concerted action. I believe that what we do is to "articulate" or co-ordinate what are essentially different goals or different versions of the goal, so that it seems to us, and things work out more or less as if, there were a common goal. But this requires a lot of work, which is a large part of the "communication" that Matusov points to. Our goals are different insofar as our ROLES in the activity are different; it is a product of the division of labor. This is not very different from the familiar argument that our \*interests\* differ according to the division of labor. This view for me seems to follow from the perspective, mentioned by many lately, that goals have to be defined relationally. It is only in terms of our relation to the activity, our role in it, the relation the activity constitutes between us and some "object" (i.e. that can constitute an object-as-thing into an object-as-goal) that we can speak of some goal.

I will wait to see what others say before offering a non-expert view of how to interpret goal-object-motive across the levels of operation, action, activity. I think this is a key issue as identified by Mike Cole, and wonderful as Matusov's analysis is, it doesn't yet give the more fully comprehensive overview we seem to need. (Though I vaguely remember Arne and Yrjo posting on this issue some months back? yes?)

JAY.

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**13.59. Date: Sat, 13 Nov 1993 10:24:39 -0500 (EST)**

From: GORD\_WELLS@OISE.ON.CA  
Subject: Re: Ideals for education  
To: xclass@ucsd.edu, xact@ucsd.edu

Jay Lemke is dangling the bait:

<<I was hoping someone would rise to the defense of enculturation models of education, as Gordon Wells in part ...>>  
but I'm not prepared to be hooked! or, only in part ...

As I tried to make clear in my various contributions to this discussion - and more explicitly and systematically in the paper that was put out for discussion about this time last year ("What have you learned?": Co-constructing the meaning of time), my interpretation of sociocultural theory leads to a view of education as involving a necessary dialectic between cultural reproduction and appropriation of the achievements of the past, on the one hand, and cultural renewal through individual divergence and creativity, on the other. In my view, these `goals' are not incompatible. Indeed, were it not for the hierarchical organizational structure of schooling as an institution, such a constructive dialectic would be the natural outcome of bringing together persons at different stages in their life trajectories with time and resources to inquire and explore the world they co-inhabited.

Jay's last message is subtly different in tone and in the views expressed from the one to which I replied more stridently. In fact, I am happy to join with him in arguing that, given the institution of schooling as it currently exists,

<<And it is not "de-schooling" that I am after (that is another issue, depends what we mean by "schools"), but something more like "de-curricularization", where "curriculum" is used to mean a uniform set of goals and/or strategies imposed on students by Others.>>

For me - and I suspect for many other participants on this network - the problem is to find ways of effectively working towards this `goal' (I'm sorry, that word will keep creeping in! I must be an unregenerate middle-aged, middle-class, etc. etc.).

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**13.60. Date: Sat, 13 Nov 1993 13:49:04 -0800**

From: Ritva Engestrom <rengestr@weber.ucsd.edu>  
Subject: object  
To: xact@ucsd.edu

I am inspired by Eugene Matusov's message titled "goal is action (and I like to add Igor Arievitch whose message I just noticed). Eugene's "goal is mediated action" gives great examination about action-level in Leontiev's scheme. At the same time message leaves unanswered or open the question what is object, but it gives good construction frames for it.

Eugene concludes

- > goal is re-organization of psychological field through mediated
- > ("detouring") action to master own behavior toward desired object.

In this definition we have the both words: goal and object, but instead of being equals (and circle definition), object is desired. It requires some kind of externalization and internalization process where a person (or a animal) is active. We can say shortly that the definition tells us about "a somebody is active" but not about "object".

Eugene gives us some examples of experiments done by Gestalt psychologists. They reminded me Leontiev's introduction to the object-related activity in the PREhistory of human activity. It introduces to the notion of 'object' as very simple premordial case. In example where hen and dog can see from window the food behind the wall, object is not 'getting the food' (which refers to something that is desired), but object is 'food behind the wall'. I want to emphasize that object is not 'food' (simply because it is material) but the whole entity 'food behind the wall' inspires and directs THE behavior of these animals. From the human activity view point the example is about psychological research activity where of course we encounter very different kind of object.

Why I am emphasizing the difference between the concepts of goal and object and its methodological relevance to the analytical and research work. Because I think that when you start to study human activities, the findings of object 'as such' become crucial at activity level ( in Leontiev's scheme). Of course goals and desired objects exist as phenomena. I take an example from medical activity (one of my research area). If we use the notion of 'desired object', what is desired, is something like 'help people' or 'treat people' or 'reduce early mortality'. But this helps very little the researcher who is supposed to study modern health care system (compare the discussion what is going on at USA). I do not mean that Eugene uses the notion this way, vice verse, I try to show how he locates the notion to the

action-level. But in xact- discussions 'goals', 'desired objects' and 'objects' are often used without notifying or explicating their differences.

What is then object which is detached from subject (discontinuity- relationship between subject and object) in medical activities. History tells very concretely how people died for diseases, how they were bleeding, fevering etc. Everyone sees in this context how 'desired object' and 'object' are very different notions. 'Object' has own internal life: fatal diseases are different today than before modern medicine or even before World War II, people's experiences and notions on symptoms have been changing, people's demands for medical care have been changing etc. Object of modern medical activity is something like this kind of entity.

Of course nothing happens (in human activity sense) if people are not active. That is, I think, what Leontiev's scheme is all about: the process which realizes subjects connections into outside world.

How we see communication in this context, is an other interesting not conflicting issue.

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### **13.61. Date: Sat, 13 Nov 93 19:01:23 EST**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@cunyvm.bitnet>

Subject: More on goals

To: Activity Theory Group <XACT@UCSD.BitNet>

Trying to encompass and synthesize the many exciting arguments people have been making lately about goals and objects is very challenging and stimulating.

I would like to make some comments on a few contributions from the last few days, and to sketch some of my own views about goals and mediation.

Ritva Engestrom reminds us that we need to consider discontinuity as well as continuity in the subject-object relation. The Cartesian view we try to supersede made discontinuity a given, and we have worked with notions of interactivity and self-organizing system to emphasize continuity. We can carry this too far, of course. Arieviditch also makes this point: it is the \*exteriority\* that may get neglected. Materialism (embodiment, material processes of interactivity) does not itself shield us from a semiotic idealism or solipsism. While we probably all accept that we deal with the exterior, or the object, only through cultural mediations, its meanings for us, even if we take the perceptual and meaning-making processes themselves to be material in nature, we cannot restrict "agency" to subjects.

I know that is an odd way to say it. What I mean is that we need to take into account the "counter-process", the sense in which the properties of the objects (whether pottery clay or other persons) actively react to our constructions of them. True interactivity is modeled on the subject-subject dynamic, even if we apply it to the subject-object relation. When we interact with an object, materially and semiotically mediatedly, the object changes (at least for us, probably for an observer, and we conjecture "for itself" as well), and its changes are not determinable solely from our actions. They are not even determinable solely from our actions plus an account of "its" properties. The changes can only be accounted for, in general, by considering that a new system (probably always already an old one, but changed in some way) of subject-object comes into being. In this new system there are emergent properties, some of which we call, a bit arbitrarily, the properties of the object, and others the properties of the subject, but really they are properties of the system.

Just as we cannot account for the changes in the object from a model in which the only agency is us (acting on a passive object-with-properties), so, by exactly the same arguments, neither can we account on such a model for the changes in "us". In the new system (situation, activity) we also have emergent properties, or behave as if we did. One way to talk about this is to ascribe a sort of agency to the object as well, to speak of its role in the counter-process which responds to our agentive action toward it. Maybe this is not the best way to talk about it. We are used to this model for subject-subject interactions, but probably the self-organizing supersystem view is more satisfactory for all such cases, at least to me. Unfortunately we have fewer intuitions about it, less familiarity. We are less comfortable with a view of the world in which things are epiphenomena of processes and in which the ascription of properties to things is rather arbitrary. In the new view you cannot model the universe by knowing all the things in it and all their properties. And we cannot model ourselves as things with properties either. This is deeply contrary to our modern (and perhaps some older) traditions.

Joe Toth has very insightfully described how the shift from the old view (isolated person-agents with models and goals acting causally on inert objects or states of a passive system) to the new one is still playing itself out in AI theory. In doing so he calls attention to an important part of the old scenario: the assumption that people have the power to control objects (which is an ideological derivative of the logic of control over other subjects). In that view, there are causal actions which can be taken which will produce predictable changes in the state of the object-system. But in the self-organization view, this is not generally the case (even though we can fabricate special situations where we can convince ourselves that it is). The subject-agent becomes part of the system, the system shows emergent properties, the changes of its state are not controllable and predictable in general. Indeed it becomes difficult to define what a "state" is since dynamics replace static configurations.

What happens to the usefulness of the notion of "goal" in a model where the only goals we can achieve are the necessarily changed ones that it turns out at some point we \*have\* achieved? We can convince ourselves that where we got to is where we wanted to get to, but we are no longer the same we, the situation we are in at the end is a different system from the one that defined us before, and it is quite problematic how to say that there is an identity between a "goal" which was a feature of the prior system, and a construction of "now" (when "that goal" is achieved), which is a feature of the new system.

One can say that part of the job of culture is to conceal this problem, to provide ready-made ways (activity types, genres) of convincing ourselves that prospective and retrospective constructions coincide again and again. Of course it is only insofar as they do not that there is development and cultural change.

I will leave the implications of this view for activities/actions/operations and their various notions of goal or object-directedness for a separate post. JAY.

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### **13.62. Date: Sat, 13 Nov 93 19:02:12 EST**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@cunyvm.bitnet>

Subject: Objects, goals, levels

To: Activity Theory Group <XACT@UCSD.BitNet>

I realize that there are some differences within AT about terminology and how best to define the relations of the three levels of activities, actions, and operations or operational means. It seems that there is also some sort of notion of goal and/or motive and/or object-directedness associated with each of these levels of analysis. Others on this list are much better qualified in their own traditions of AT than I am to discuss the alternative views. I would like to give my own view, as someone who is a fellow-traveler of AT, who sees it as a useful discourse within a system of distinct but compatible theoretical tools needed for practice. I happen, temperamentally and philosophically, to believe that no theoretical model or discourse can be both complete and self-consistent (paraphrasing and extending Godel), and that the best we can do is to juggle, in as principled ways as possible, a variety of discourses, adapting them, bricoleur-fashion, to the practice of the moment.

The key feature of three-level models is that the concepts on each level are defined by their relations to one or two other levels. Thus a critical issue in AT is how we determine that, say, a given action is enacted through these particular operational means, or which actions belong to the same activity. Our common sense view of such matters works from the top down, and I believe that this is the traditional

cognitive science view. I prefer to look at things from the bottom up, which is more of a behaviorist view.

I appreciate, by the way, the good words for behaviorism from some on the list lately. I have always regretted, from the perspective of American intellectual culture, that when it became clear that behaviorism was severely limited, especially in its ability to deal with human uses of language, by not having a notion of meaning, that this became an excuse to reintroduce mentalism (in the form of Chomsky's neo-Cartesian linguistics and the cognitivism of the 70s) and to ignore the serious behaviorist critique of mentalist approaches. What was missing was not mind, as such, but meaning, which can be found in cultural and semiotic models with much less dangerous ideological freighting, even though these are correspondingly more difficult to unify with descriptions of behavior as material action.

So what makes some material process, part bodily, part object-interacting, an operational means in some action? Another way to say this is, What constitutes the unity of an action, considered as a dynamic constellation of operations? The level of operational means, I think, is most strongly justified as a level of analysis in order to foreground the phenomenon of automatization. What we construe, culturally, as unitary actions, appear, when we regard them through the magnifying lenses of, say, kinesic analysis (or acoustic phonetics), as composed of many smaller references, articulations, co-ordinations which together constitute the action. Adding in the interactive dimension, there are also many loops, involving reafferences, dynamic regulations and modulations, as the total system (subject-interacting-with-object) self-organizes, taking into account the "counter-processes" and the changes in object and subject resulting from their interaction. Microscopically these are in fact different on every occasion, as we might expect.

Take our famous (and perhaps today ecologically "incorrect") example from Bateson of the man (human of any age, gender, etc.) chopping down the poor innocent (indeed friendly) tree. Suppose that taking an axe-swing at the tree's trunk is an action. All the little movements and adjustments of the swing, largely but not entirely automated for the practiced axe-swinger, are presumably part of the operatory means of enacting this action. They include the feel of the axe, the air resistance as a function of the angle of swing, the multiple sensations of the bite into the tree and the reverberation and rebound of the axe (in which we might label the air and the tree as subjects, as actants, to avoid isolating them as purely passive components).

Now, is the gripping of the axe-handle part of this same action? the hefting of the axe? picking it up? pulling it back for the next swing? Is the shower of splintering wood chips (probably important feedback information to the axeman's practiced eye in adjusting for the next stroke)? Is the sound of the impact? (or listening for that sound, in a more subject-biased view?)

Is a grunt, or shout, or curse? inner speech guiding the action? a zen-like suspension of inner speech to let the action flow un-distracted?

Is the second stroke a repeat of the same action-type? on what grounds? what must be similar?

Experienced analysts of any sort of human activity will recognize that while the answers to these questions are always a bit arbitrary, the criteria we use to settle upon our answers are very important methodologically, and the kind of criteria we appeal to are important theoretically.

I do not think that it is ultimately satisfactory to appeal to any notion of intention or motive, nor solely to any criteria of material interactivity, to ground the unity of operational means to an action. What unifies an action, I think, is that it has cultural meaning for us as an action, that we can construe it as an instance of a recognized and recognizable action-type. This unity does not extend into the domain of automaticity, which we describe through specialized discourses, and which involves differences that are not counted culturally as making a difference in whether or not an action of a particular type has been performed or not. In answering questions like those raised above, we are trying to map two incommensurable domains onto one another: the semiotic-cultural and the material-behavioral. This was the problem behaviorism tried and failed to avoid. We can describe operational means and we can describe actions, but the language of actions does not tell us how to map them onto operations.

I will return to this dilemma, but first let's look at the same issue one level up. Given a set of actions, what unifies them into constituents of the same activity? Here, I think, we do not face the same problem because our cultural systems do tell us about both activity-types and action-types and do specify the criteria for the former in terms of optional and obligatory occurrences of the latter (as for genres).

If Felling-a-Tree-with-an-Axe is an activity-type, then it certainly includes picking up the axe, and hitting the tree with it repeatedly. It is not complete as long as the tree is still standing vertically. Canonically it may include calling "Timber!" and the crash of the tree hitting the ground. Maybe that is the end, and maybe not, since activities tend to always be embedded in other activities. With what action did this activity begin?

Now we can consider some of the principles for relating across levels. One, obviously, would be to say that all the actions undertaken in pursuit of the same Goal are parts of the same activity. This approach has two major sorts of problems. One is that it has to invoke intentionality of the subject, so that the same culturally defined action is or is not a part of the same culturally recognized activity depending on whether or not a particular actor thinks it is / intends it to be / sees it as being. Since activities in general involve multiple subject-actors, this leads to questions already raised by others, and \*not\* obviously solved just by

communication among them. Commonality of agreement here, when it occurs, is more a cultural phenomenon than a cognitive or communicational one. It pre-exists the activity. This view is also far too subject-centered to adequately account for emergent properties of the whole subject-object system, and this is linked to the retrospective/prospective problem about Goals, discussed before.

Another problem is that if the Goal is identified with a particular state of the system (say, "tree is down", though really it has to be more like: "People perceive tree as down"), then whether any action belongs to the activity depends on a view of whether it contributed to bringing about the Goal. But this in turn runs into the problems of causal-control assumptions discussed before. And it also has no limit, since all causal series are infinitely regressive. Any act that caused the tree to fall has its own causal precursors, etc., etc. The way in which this regress is truncated is by appeal to subject intentionality.

An alternative view would appeal to functional interdependence. All those actions which are functionally interdependent with the actions culturally recognized as normal parts of the activity, or which can be so construed by culturally recognized criteria (to allow for scientific analysis) belong to the activity. Functional interdependence basically means that one action depends on another for its conditions of possibility or for its distinctive form (i.e. differences of form that make a difference in how it is typed as an action, what kind of action or action subtype it is). This avoids all the problems except infinite regress. In that respect it is even worse than the Goal model, because we now find that all activities are linked through the functional interdependencies of their constituent actions. The notion of a distinct activity becomes somewhat arbitrary. But I believe that this is a good reflection of the way things are. Cultural definitions of activity-types operate precisely against this background of interconnectedness.

The kind of functional interdependence that links actions and makes the notion of activity possible (even if it makes any particular definition of any particular activity type a bit arbitrary) is mainly conceived in terms of cultural categories of the semiotics of action. But it is very tempting to add additional criteria based on material interdependence which may not be culturally recognized, but for which we have specialized discourses (mainly the natural science discourses). Every action can be looked at both as a semiotic type, defined by its relations of meaning (similarity, value-contrasts, etc.) to other types, and as a material process, defined by its matter-energy relations to other material processes.

This was the dilemma encountered between actions and operational means. Ordinary cultural criteria do not recognize (non-distinctive differences) many scientifically definable differences as being semiotically salient or criterial. In semiotic models of action this is the so-called line of arbitrariness between the content plane and the expression plane, or between signifier and signified. Only some differences make a difference in any given categorization by type.



However it would be very useful to have these non-distinctive material differences and relations available to help us define the boundaries of an activity in terms of functional inter-dependence. It would enable us to use the same strategy we do for defining material systems: draw the boundary through the minima of interconnection (strength of interaction, coupling, exchange). Of course these lines might not always agree with those drawn by cultural semiotic criteria. But that would be illuminating on both sides.

Shifting the grounds of functional interdependence to the material aspect of action enables us to apply it reasonably well I think to the action/operational means problem as well.

The alternative approach is to try to replicate the Goal strategy at the "lower" levels. That is, to define the unity of operational means precisely as means to bring about some action. The action becomes the Goal, or some criterial feature of the action does. Since here we have automaticity, we no longer have the serious problems associated with subject intentionality. But we still have to have a way to cross the line of arbitrariness between cultural semiotic definitions of actions or Goals and the more materially-oriented discourses that identify and describe operational means. (This is the classic phone-phoneme or kine-kineme problem). One approach here is to convert the Goal from being a cultural-semiotic entity to being more a material object, while retaining its functional role as the point of unification.

This leads, I think, to the convergence between AT models and semiotic-material dualist ones like mine. It also leads to most of the problems we have been having with the notion of "object". Object-directedness, or perhaps better: object-engagement as a way of defining the unity of actions in relation to operational means, "doubles" the object. It is now both a material-object (useful on the operations side) and a semiotic-object (defined by its actant role in the action conceived culturally-semiotically). It is a small step, already taken by many, to "double" in this way the entire action-process, not just the object, thus also decentering from the subject perspective.

I am sure there are others views of these matters from various AT perspectives, and I would be interested to hear more of them.

JAY.

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JAY LEMKE.

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**13.63. Date: Sat, 13 Nov 1993 12:36 EST**

From: WPENUEL@vax.clarku.edu  
Subject: Goals and collaboration  
To: xclass@weber.ucsd.edu

Some of the points being raised by Jay Lemke and others about metaphors of goal setting and their relation to the distribution of power in the classroom invite us to consider how learning might take place in a different way. Particularly, they demand a role for an adult or a teacher.

We've been working on these issues within community health planning in Massachusetts by working to establish successful youth-adult collaboration in youth programming in the prevention field. One of the interesting things that has come out of this work is the need for the adults in the room to really get out of the "scaffolding" and "goal-setting" mode. A lot of sociocultural research and activity models of learning have stressed adult roles in providing strategic assistance, but there are other important activities of adults in successful collaboration, like personal storytelling, confessions of ignorance, opening to a little chaos and "disorder," and assuming different participant roles in group problem-solving.

I'm in the midst of studying these kinds of interactions, and I think they have a potential impact on how we can deal with our own anxiety about letting youth and young children develop into diversity. At the same time, we've discovered that this is not at all easy!

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**13.64. Date: Sun, 14 Nov 1993 17:07:23 +0100 (MET)**

From: raeithel@rzdspc1.informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)  
Subject: Mother's Work ...  
Cc: xact@ucsd.edu, To: rengestr@weber.ucsd.edu

Dear Ritva,

many thanks for bringing up counterprocess and the problem of how to expand the category of object to encompass the working field of physicians, nurses, mothers, fathers and siblings.

When we first met 1987 in Karjaa, Finland, there was still great resistance in orthodox Marxist circles against "too much stress" on the analysis of reproductive work, remember? At that time, Christel Neusuess was still with us, who wrote a

book on "using head and hand" (like in the traditional worker's theory of mind) which she found not to have also one of "giving body and soul".

If the object of work is a subject, too, then it becomes clear that this kind of counterprocess cannot be divorced from the working person or actor as easily as the (male) guys can divorce themselves of motorcycles, books, or bakery that they have produced.

In a low circulation journal, the Duesseldorfer Debatte, I tried to discuss this with some articles, the last one called "On Mother's Work". However, nothing at all came out of this at that time.

Of course it is awkward to write about this as a man these days; seems to be easier for women to write about Father's Work. Or maybe it isn't really; I cannot recall a text with this topic either.

Have a nice Sunday,

yours truly, Arne.

### **13.65. Date: Mon, 15 Nov 93 01:00:21 PST**

From: emmy@crl.ucsd.edu (Emmy Goldknopf)

Subject: CHAT: A N. Leontiev

To: xact@weber.ucsd.edu

A. N. LEONTIEV. (1978). Activity, consciousness and personality.

Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall. Chapter 3: "The problem of activity and psychology".

#### 3.1 Two approaches in psychology

Leontiev claims that many diverse trends in psychology, from neobehaviorism to Gestaltism, have methodologies derived from the BINOMIAL plan of analysis, in which action on receptor systems leads to a subjective or objective response. Leontiev criticizes the binomial plan because it excludes the activity of the subject -- the "cogent process in which real connections of the subject with the world, his objective activity, are made" (p. 46).

According to Leontiev, positing intervening variables, such as internal states, motivating factors, needs or desires, doesn't solve the problem. Nor will it help to substitute cultural stimuli for the external world. All of these approaches assume the "postulate of directness", in which the subject is directly influenced by the outer world.

Leontiev says we must get abandon the postulate of directness and take a completely different approach, introducing into psychology the category of objective

activity. He suggests we replace the binomial formula with a TRINOMIAL formula, in which the middle link is "the activity of the subject, and correspondingly, conditions, goals and means of that activity"(p. 50).

### 3.2 The Category of Objective Activity

At the psychological level, activity "is a unit of life, mediated by psychic reflection, the real function of which is that it orients the subject in the objective world" (p.50). Activity must be considered in relation to the larger social whole: "the activity of the human individual represents a system included in the system of relationships of society." (p.51)

A constituting characteristic of activity is its OBJECTIVITY. (see Note) "Activity may seem objectless, but scientific investigation of activity necessarily requires discovering its object." The object of activity has a twofold nature, as both an independent entity to which the activity of the subject is subordinated, and as an image of the object.

According to Leontiev, the evolution of life is marked by increasing subordination of processes of activity to the objective content of activity. The development of psychic reflection, which regulates activity in the objective environment, continues this trend. Psychic reflection of the object world is generated, not by external forces, but by the processes of practical activity, which are in turn directed by the OBJECT of activity:

Object ---> process of activity Activity ---> subjective product

Objectivity also applies to needs and emotions. Leontiev distinguishes between need as an internal condition and need as that which directs the activity of the subject in an objective environment. Needs can only direct activity after they "meet" their objects.

### 3.3 Objective Activity & Psychology

Psychology must study the external objective activity of the subject [praxis] as well as internal psychological processes. Activity depends on the outside world as well as on our plans. Activity is part of the process of psychic reflection itself.

### 3.4 Relation of Internal and External Activity

As psychology begins to study external objective activity, it can take a new approach to the origins of psychic activity. Leontiev discusses the growth of the view that internal psychological activities arise through the interiorization of external activity. He presents Vygotsky's approach, in which human activity is mediated by equipment and incorporated into a system of human relationships; it is transmitted by speech and action. Individual consciousness presupposes, and is created by, social consciousness and language.

### 3.5 The General Structure of Activity

Leontiev's historical explanation of the origin of goal-directed processes also sheds light on the nature of activity and its object. At first the product of common work directly answered the need of each participant, so motive and goal were one. But the division of labor led to the isolation of intermediate partial results, which in themselves these don't satisfy the needs of workers. (The workers are satisfied by a share of the product of the collective activity, obtained through social relationships.) The partial results are also isolated subjectively, by being represented as goals.

Thus activity is broken down into individual actions, and motives are separated from goals. We may lose sight of the original activity/motive.

Activity can be divided analytically into three levels: activities, actions and operations.

-Level- -What directs it-

Activity Object/motive

Action Goal

Operation Conditions

**ACTIVITY** Activity always answers a need. The **OBJECT** of an activity is its true motive and gives it direction. (Leontiev speaks of: "activities, each of which answers a definite need of the subject, is directed toward an object of this need..[and] is extinguished as a result of its satisfaction." (p. 62)

**ACTIONS** are subordinated to the representation of a goal -- to a conscious purpose.

**OPERATIONS** are the methods of accomplishing an action and are determined by the objective conditions of its achievement. Operations start out as actions with their own goals; when they become included in other actions, they become automatized.

Activity consists entirely of actions, which consist entirely of operations. One action may accomplish various activities; conversely, one motive may elicit various actions. The levels may become transformed into each other: activities may become actions, actions may become activities, and actions become operations.

Leontiev also discusses the relation of activity to neurophysiology and neuropsychology.

Emmy Goldknopf

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Note: Throughout this chapter, Leontiev uses the word "predmet" and its derivatives for "object" and "objective." Unlike English, Russian distinguishes between "predmet" and "object" (I don't know how the transliterations are spelled). As far as I can tell, "object" means something like the English primary sense of object, that is, a physical thing. "Predmet", while it sometimes means a concrete thing, has a broader meaning. In the context of activity theory, it means the object of activity, as in the motive of activity; what directs activity.

The question of what the object is in activity theory goes beyond problems with English. I welcome comments on both words and meaning.

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This reading was part of Topic 4, "Units of analysis." The summary was improved by discussion in class, by discussions with Victor Kaptelinin and Larry Bogoslaw, and by the recent discussion of goals on xact and xlchc. Additions and corrections are welcome.

### **13.66. Date: Mon, 15 Nov 93 12:12:46 -0800**

From: ematusov@cats.UCSC.EDU  
Subject: Re: CHAT: A N. Leontiev  
To: emmy@crl.ucsd.edu, xact@weber.ucsd.edu

Let me comment here on Emmy Goldknopf's note about translation of the Leont'ev's term "predmet."

In Russian, "predmet" also means "topic," "subject," "theme," or even "direction." I just checked the Russian text of Leont'ev's book "The problems of psychological development" ("Problemy razvitiya psyhkiki"). I found that in many cases it would be better to translate "predmet" as "direction" rather than "object." Consider, for example, the following excerpt from the book:

<<U zhivotnikh, kak my uzhe govorili, \*predmet\* ikh deyatel'nosti i eyo biologicheskii motiv vsegda clity, vsegda sovpadayut mezhdu soboi.

As we have already said, \*direction\* ["predmet"] of animals' activity and their biological motive are always tied up, always overlap with each other (p.279).>>

However, sometimes Leont'ev meant "object" as well. In some places, "predmet" even means "product" of the activity. Consider for example, the following excerpt (in my translation):

<<How does the origin of action, i.e. separation of the \*direction\* ["predmet"] of the activity and its motive, become possible? Obviously, it becomes possible only in a joint, collective process of influence upon the nature. The \*product\* ["product"] of this process generally corresponding to the need of the group leads also to fulfillment of individual's need, although s/he may or may not participate in the final actions ["operatzii"] (for example, in direct attacking and killing an animal in hunting), which directly lead to appropriation of \*object\* ["predmet"] of the given need. Developmentally ["geneticheski"], (i.e., in the accord with its origin) the separation of \*direction\* ["predmet"] and motive of individual activity is a result of ongoing extraction of separate operations ["operatzii"] from the activity, which recently was complex and multiphase, but united. Exactly these separate operations, now exhausting the content of the given individual's activity, transform themselves in independent (for the individual) aFA%=9 j4% V-.];ie"]. Although, in the regard to the collective labor process taken as a whole, they continue being only particular elements of the collective labor process, of course. (pp. 279- 80).>>

I don't know whether I made clear or confused even more the issue. But I really want to appreciate Emmy's effort to bring our attention to this terminological and translation problems of Leont'ev's using the term "predmet."

Eugene Matusov.

University California at Santa Cruz.

### **13.67. Date: Wed, 17 Nov 1993 10:09:22 -0800**

From: nardi@taurus.apple.com (Bonnie Nardi)  
Subject: studying objects  
To: xact@ucsd.edu

I will try to use standard AT terminology in this posting. My question is, given the many views of objects and goals that we have seen in our recent discussion, how would we go about studying them, empirically and otherwise? We have been mostly talking from the comfort of the armchair.

This reminded me of a study I did ten years ago, before I was acquainted with activity theory, but when I was trying to understand how people make decisions. I studied reproductive decision making in a small village in Western Samoa, where completed family sizes are very high (about 8 children). This is \*not\* due to lack of birth control, which is freely available and well understood, but rather to the value of children, economically and socially. I wanted to understand how people think about the problem of family size. What I found was that decisions are structured by "scenarios" -- brief, pithy depictions of a desired future state. I describe all this in my paper:

Goals in Reproductive Decision Making, *American Ethnologist*, 10, 697-714, 1983.

My use of the word "goals" in the paper would correspond to the AT term "object."

I think this paper might be of interest to some thinking about how humans direct their action, since there are empirical data. Interestingly, though it may look like I am arguing for some kind of Cartesian model, I was in fact reacting against the rigid mathematical models of decision making in vogue at the time, in which it was posited that people calculate "weights" and "utilities" in making decisions. The scenarios I elicited most certainly do describe a desired end state, but they are flexible, malleable, and responsive to environmental change (as I discuss in some detail in the article).

This particular area of study, reproductive decision making, is interesting wrt to our recent discussions because it is an area where certainly one might go back and justify all those children one somehow ended up having. But in living in the village for a year, I became convinced that that is not true; that it is indeed an important part of a life project to have a large family, and is a deliberate, conscious choice on the part of Samoan villagers, with distinct cultural and personal objects at stake.

It is a challenge for us to understand people as more than behavioristic reactive units, and yet not fall into the rational-actor-who-runs-the-script model promulgated so long in cognitive science. The relationship between thought and action is indeed an intimate one, and I don't think we understand it well yet. Some empirical work could shed some light (empirical work which is probably already there, if we would go back and look at it).

Again, the question is, what tools do we use to decide among our competing viewpoints? Rhetoric is only the first step.

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**13.68. Date: Sat, 20 Nov 1993 13:59:53 +0100 (MET)**

From: raeithel@rzdspc1.informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)  
Subject: Political Origins of Activity Concept  
To: xact@ucsd.edu

First I would like to say again, how much joy and interesting work our present discussion means for me. In my room, all my papers of 12 and more years ago are spread in a new pattern, mostly German text, intermixed with newer ones of "the qualitative, ethnographic, cultural-historical movement".



Today, I would first like to concentrate on the question of what "levels of life-processes" (Ebenen der Lebensprozesse) could mean from a slightly wider perspective than what is usually read on the pages of AN Leont'ev's "Activity, Consciousness, Personality".

In the past three xfamily years I have learned that there are at least two distinguished and well worked-out traditions in understanding this category of a process level, namely (1) Schneirla's theory of "integrative levels" (Ethel Tobach has recently hinted at this body of work) in psychobiology, and general biology of evolution, and (2) the flavor of general systems theory that Stan Salthe has pointed at when talking of hurricanes, as if those lived, too.

These traditions are brothers and sisters of similar ones in both East- and West-Germany during the years after '68. The eye-opener for me personally was the book that Erich Jantsch wrote, knowing that his remaining years could be counted on one hand only: "Die Selbstorganisation des Universums" (I believe that this needs no formal translation into English). It is a marvellous high flight combined with deep-diving into about 14 (7 plus 7) levels of the organization of living beings, ending, of course with the mythical Quarks, but then going back up until the book ends right in the middle, where persons are and associate to form Green organisations, or some of different colour.

This is all in some newspapers and geographic magazines of today. Therefore, I will assume of my readers here on XACT: having "long since" taken hold of this paradigm of unbroken, but also violently differentiated, wholeness of the life-process on earth. The only thing(k) that interests me in the following is: How to variously expand the concept/category of "the activity level" in AN Leont'ev's last book, and how to choose between the variants.

Both Chuck Bazerman and Jay Lemke have offered possible expansions, while the definite text //for our discussion here, at least// has been summarized in Emmy Goldknopf's recent class paper, and the following explanation with example. Today, Jacques Haenen has sent another authoritative account, using the genre of a journal contribution, and offering a very structured and lucid explanation of the differences between Galperin's and AN Leont'ev's research programmes.

I apologize for writing the rest of this note without explicit citations, however. I fear that it would grow to an unbearable length otherwise, and I know that it would be less readable. I also include what I believe to know from the texts of writers that have not taken active part in the XACT of past weeks.

I trust that any of you who do not find themselves in my Mirror\*,

and find this fact important enough, will send their notes in due time.

/\*/ VP Zinchenko said in one discussion in Lahti 1990:

/\*/ Vygotsky is a Mirror: What you see first is Your Own Theory.

I want to contest Jay Lemke's remark that the process levels may best be described by the relations *\*between\** them. On the contrary, we should *\*start\** by looking at each level as an autonomous process exhibiting self-determination, and resistance against influences from "above" and "below", or "outside" and "inside" -- this is what I want to argue for. //see also Koestler's Holon concept//

All the while, most of Jay's inferences and pointers to unsolved problems reverberate positively with my own hunches and convictions. The between-level couplings in Jay's and Chuck's postings do indeed exist, and must be analyzed closely -- after we have understood each level's autonomy.

A week ago, I have tried to introduce the notion of "reproductive closure" of a functional system, i.e. the rule to draw the limits in a description of the system in the same regions where the system itself has its boundaries and points of exchange. This rule is meant to solve the problem of identifying the "unit of analysis" in some stream of empirical data (qualitative or quantitative, experience data or measurements). It is clear that the unit of analysis is different on all the process levels, and from Jacques Haenen's account we see that the focus of researcher's interest adds an additional degree of freedom: One may construe "activity" as some higher unity of a person's conduct (Galperin, Velichkovsky, Holzkamp, Hacker do this, in again different ways), or one may choose to construe "activity" as a societally distributed, thereby generalized, pattern of cooperation in communities (Davydov, Engestroem, Garai, Radzhikovsky, Rueckriem, Wertsch, and many others).

It is easy to show that the second option is the one that Karl Marx has taken when in the years 1842 to 1845 he started out as a Hegelian philosopher of politics, and political journalist. In these years he gradually developed the concept of "gegenstaendliche Taetigkeit" as "self-production of humanity", discovered the autonomy of economical processes against the will of the societal actors, and had a lot of very good ideas of how to study cultures, forms of living, "self-determination of human destiny" together with his newly found friend, Friedrich Engels.

For Hegelians it was clear that human communities are wholenesses embedded in still wider wholes, with many contradictions, and fights, and atrocities. The Terror during French Revolution was well remembered then, the poverty of Working Class in England just becoming known on the Continent. Yet, at the beginning there was hope and energy to be put in the newly institutionalised forms of democracy in the Prussian Rhine provinces. Marx analyzed in the "Rheinische Zeitung" how the congressmen represented their regional communities, realizing more and more clearly that most representatives used communal forms of activity for their own private profit (this is a cross level effect like in Chuck Bazerman's examples). Yet these forms have a resistance of their own against being so used. In some cases, this resistance is broken by the power of the judicial institutions, by judges and

policemen, acting unwittingly in the interest of some cunning individual profit plan. In the long run, however, no individual interest will be a stable attractor for profit, because too many other individuals will work at cross purposes...

This analysis of politicians and economic interest groups is common knowledge today. The problem is how to make the style again fruitful in today's research settings, focussing on smaller cultural units with a view to make visible to communities and networks the ingredients of their "self"-determination, and ways to regulate their "other"-determination.

Arne.

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## 14. Unforgettable school 1993: 3 / 3

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### 14.1. Date: Fri, 26 Nov 1993 09:10:36 +0100

[back to table of AL messages](#)

From: lang@PSY.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)  
Subject: Re: REQUEST for references  
To: xact@weber.ucsd.edu, xclass@weber.ucsd.edu

Scott Woodbridge was asking for references on after school educational environments. I am not informed to help in this field, but Scott's request reminded me of a boyhood reading experience of myself which I have never forgotten and since long would like to re-read or learn more about.

It was a -- fictitious or real? -- description of a boarding school of the twenties or early thirties in eastern US (near New York, perhaps) that in my memory somehow resembles the Fifth Generation. The information was in a 20 page or so chapter in a German youth yearbook which I cannot locate anymore. The school was described as a village with a dozen or so artisans or professionals of all sorts -- carpenters, potters, printers, painters, computers, journalists, ... -- just working all day long in their accessible shops or offices, in not so pressing time schedules, though. Students were free to do what they wanted. Newcomers used to sleep and do nothing for some time until bored and becoming interested in the work in some of the shops and eventually asking to lend the craftsman or other children in the shops a hand. On the student's initiative the teacher-craftsmen and the already established students would a bit reluctantly give them minor duties and then they would eventually develop relationships - with ups and downs in between, of course -- of mutual assistance and cooperative work to learn while producing something useful.

Naturally, the above description sounds very Deweyan in its philosophy of education, but I so far have not seen any related passage in his writings which I do know only selectively. If you, Scott, or anybody else of the readership knows about a description of such a school, I would be glad and grateful to see some reference. I may have idealized the description over the roughly 50 years since reading, I suspect. But I couldn't forget it since. And certainly, I would like to have the power to arrange not only after school institutions and plain school settings but above all for an university organized after that model. Even if it were only to see what happens. But I am confident it would be great. If dreams are still the parents of realities...

Cheers, Alfred

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## 14.2. Date: Wed, 8 Dec 1993 10:48:24 +0100

From: lang@PSY.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)  
Subject: Re: Reference on workshop school  
To: xclass@weber.ucsd.edu CC: CIJOHN <CIJOHN@LSUVM.BITNET>, fherrmann@igc.apc.org, slongo@PSY.unibe.ch, studer@PSY.unibe.ch, bluemli@PSY.unibe.ch, schreiber@PSY.unibe.ch

John St. Julien and Francoise Herrmann have kindly replied directly to my request for help reproduced at the end of this message and which is based on a boyhood lecture. Both have suggested the description might refer to A.S. Neill's Summerhill, thought this, of course, was in GB.

Thank you both for the hint. I have checked Neill's main book and come to the conclusion that "my" description does not refer to Summerhill although there are many similarities. In Summerhill, there are (were?) classes and lessons and artisan type activities are in after school hours. "My" "school" is a village, of a couple of pavillions which are, in fact, workshops. The people, younger and older, living there cooperatively produce goods, primarily, rather than knowledge, skills or personalities. The latter are a side-effect of the former rather than the principal reason of existence of the school. Or, perhaps, the two orientation (to avoid the term "goal") of the daily activity in the village is well balanced to give equal rights to external (social, tools, products etc.) and internal (experience, strategies, coherence, self in group etc.) conditions and effects. (This is not to imply that Summerhill is not a great thing, in its proper existence at least, while the selective (anti-authoritarian) way it has been taken up by a larger society has perhaps been more of a mixed blessing.)

So I am still open and grateful for hints. Alfred

Main section of my message of November 26:

>

>It was a -- fictitious or real? -- description of a boarding school of the  
>twenties or early thirties in eastern US (near New York, perhaps) that in  
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>anymore. The school was described as a village with a dozen or so artisans  
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>computers, journalists, ... -- just working all day long in their  
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>Students were free to do what they wanted. Newcomers used to sleep and do  
>nothing for some time until bored and becoming interested in the work in  
>some of the shops and eventually asking to lend the craftsman or other  
>children in the shops a hand. On the student's initiative the  
>teacher-craftsmen and the already established students would a bit  
>reluctantly give them minor duties and then they would eventually develop  
>relationships - with ups and downs in between, of course -- of mutual  
>assistance and cooperative work to learn while producing something useful.  
>

-----  
Alfred Lang E-mail on Internet: lang@psy.unibe.ch  
Psychology, Univ.of Bern, Unitobler, Muesmattstrasse 45,  
CH-3000 Bern 9, Switzerland  
Home: Hostalen 106, CH-3037 Herrenschwanden  
-----

### **14.3. : Wed, 15 Dec 1993 23:30:04 +0100**

From: lang@PSY.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)  
Subject: Re: Schools from the "progressive" era  
To: enz <enz@PSUVM.PSU.EDU>CC: fherrmann <fherrmann@igc.apc.org>,  
"cijohn%lsuvm.bitnet" <cijohn@lsuvm.bitnet>, woody <woody@edstar.gse.ucsb.edu>,  
xclass@weber.ucsd.edu, xact@weber.ucsd.edu

Margaret:

great! Rose Valley! The name immediately returned back to my mind. And yes, I have forgotten: the kids also built houses. From my venture point, Philadelphia is (or was when I was a boy reading maps) not so far from New York. Thanks a lot for the information. I shall check into the book. Since it is reprinted (?) there appears to be some interest in the school type of more than historical kind.

Thanks to you and also to all those who tried to help me find the source!

Alfred lang@psy.unibe.ch

Margaret Benson wrote me:

>Alfred,  
> When I read your original note I thought that I knew what/where  
>the school was that you were interested in. Now, I'm not so sure.

>(It took until now for me to remember to check a book that I keep  
>tucked away in a corner of my office.)  
> The book is called "The School in Rose Valley: A Parent Venture in  
>Education." It is by Grace Rotzel, and the edition I have was published  
>in 1972 by Ballentine Books. But the copyright is to Johns Hopkins Univ.  
>Press, 1971.  
> Rose Valley was begun early in this century as a stock company,  
>chartered to encourage handicrafts, and was "part of an arts and crafts  
>movement, inspired by Ruskin and Morris." However, the venture died a  
>financial death, leaving behind a sort of spirit that embued the people  
>who lived in the valley. In the late twenties, horrified by the local  
>schools (restrictive, and uninspiring) they started the school in Rose  
>Valley.  
> It sounds like a not untypical progressive, open-classroom, "free"  
>school. But it had a strong "do-it-yourself" component, Rotzel attributes  
>to the committment of the parents, and the depression. The latter made  
>doing it on their own an imperative for success, and also prevented  
>expansion until, as it worked out, they were clearer about what they  
>were doing.  
> The children were involved in actually building the school at the  
>beginning. They built a "barn" suitable for guinea pigs and a setting  
>hen; they built a playhouse for the kindergarten, complete with windows,  
>door and fireplace. But the most ambitious project seems to be building  
>a classroom! When completed it had two rooms, one 20' by 24' and the other  
>10' by 10', with folding doors between, a cloak room and two toilets.  
>The kids worked on the plumbing, as well as the building. Oh, they also  
>built a dam in a nearby swamp.  
> To teach biology to young children Rotzel got herself trained as  
>an official bird-bander. Then she got the kids involved in keeping  
>feeders tended, and in observing and noting the habits of birds. They  
>weren't allowed to band the birds, but they could make notes, keep  
>records, and observe, observe, observe.  
> Sounds like highly developmental practice to me.  
> As I said, this doesn't sound like quite the place you were thinking  
>of, but you might enjoy the book anyway. Oh, by the way, Rose Valley  
>is outside Philadelphia.  
>  
> Margaret

>Margaret S. Benson | Bitnet: enz@psuvm  
>Dept. of Psychology | Internet: enz@psuvm.psu.edu  
>119 Eiche Building |  
>Penn State Univ., Altoona  
>Altoona, PA 16601

[next AL message](#)



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## 15. Ritalin and ADD? 1994: 1 / 1

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### 15.1. Date: Thu, 3 Mar 1994 12:30:14 +0100

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)  
Subject: The drugs, or on the dozed and the kickers  
To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

There have been now well over 50 highly stimulating and eye-opening contributions to the topic -- another one of the great periods of this medium! Big thanks to all contributors for their frankly stated opinion and for the many interesting facts. There is, however and strangely, a big taboo hovering over the exchange. Somebody sooner or later had to break it. Let's call it the dozed vs. the kickers.

As it was said, there are millions of kids in industrialized and overschooled societies on dozing drugs (please open the metaphor: its not the societies, but the individuals that are made industrious and schooled). They are put on the drug by professionals according to one social construction the bio-reality of which is unclear but will definitely become manifest when they have been dozed. And the doze then certainly helps making life easier for them and their families and teachers. No question. At least in the short run. Thus the kids become part of another social reality and its various consequences, i.e. they acquire a technique to cope with personal and social tasks by means of chemical push-buttons.

There also a couple of millions of kids and grown-ups in the modern human zoo who have started kicking themselves with drugs. Whatever the exact conditions were at the start, chances are that they are equally undefined and probably as undefinable and perhaps not completely different from the conditions of the doze-candidates. And once started kicking themselves they have of course also a similar kind of bio-reality in their bodies and they also acquire a dubitable push-button competence to deal with themselves. But their family and some of their friends do not like it at all. Thus the comparison breaks down: there is (with few exceptions) no friendly social construction to support them with helpful crutches, but a big repressive shout of a social construction: we want you to stop this and to go on living -- i.e. in the cages and treadmills of our zoo, and working hard indeed towards the greater happiness of some and towards the worse for the rest of the people and the planet.

Let us try to describe the total field of the two types of cases and find the crucial bifurcation between the two kinds of courses of things. I would presume something like: there are not so different problem situations at start in the two cases, I mean

their living condition, socially and psychically. They both struggle somehow, and nobody seems to understand their awkward expressions of their condition and work on the foundation rather than on the symptoms of it. You might deny the similarity of the preconditions; but then I would expect you, for logical reasons, to adduce material to refute their similarity.

I do not wish with this to hurt or blame anybody's beliefs or values. Just propose to analyze in cold blood a serious condition of social constructionitis, so to say.

Alfred Lang lang@psy.unibe.ch (Univ. Bern)

[next AL message](#)

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## 16. Email citations 1994: 1 / 17

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### 16.1. Date: Mon, 11 Apr 94 21:34:01 EDT

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.BitNet>  
Subject: Quoting xfamily messages  
To: General Forum <XLCHC@UCSD.BitNet>

I'd like to raise a general question regarding our xfamily.

Recently a number of people have been asking me for permission to quote from postings to xfamily lists for a variety of purposes, and I have also heard from others that such quotations have been turning up here and there unbeknownst to me.

It's flattering, of course, to be considered worth quoting. I do enjoy writing the occasional sound-bite to the list to make a point, though most of the quotations I know of are not ones I would have expected.

I certainly consider that what I write here is public, and I believe that xfamily has a general policy of citations to list postings from long before I joined.

What concerns me enough to raise it with the list is whether the practice of quoting our messages here, particularly in print in formal scholarly publications, might not have an inhibiting effect on the free-wheeling nature of our exchanges, which I value highly.

This new medium inherits some of its properties from the genres of casual, if serious, academic conversation and others from the genres of written scholarly discourse. But those two activity types have very different functions, norms, and criteria of valuation in our community. Conversational discourse has a degree of ephemerality that frees us to venture, to risk, to explore ideas, and leaves us free to change or evolve our views in the dynamics of dialogue. What we say at any particular moment may not be long-considered and a settled, committed view or claim.

When we write for publication, we have, usually, had long prior consideration, many relevant conversations, and ample opportunity to revise our views toward some temporarily stable or satisfying position. Those who read us do so assuming we have done this.

Contributions to our xfamily lists range from spur-of-the-moment rejoinders to expositions of long and carefully elaborated theoretical positions. But when they

are quoted in print, out of the context of the discussion, they may all seem to have a more settled status than they did when we wrote them. We may even have changed our views later in the dialogue. Efforts to represent our views in print may end up unintentionally misrepresenting them.

We live, as always, in transitional times. This is not a problem for the ages, but I think it can be a problem for us right now. I would like to know how listmembers feel about this issue, and what the traditions or policies of xfamily have been? I particularly wonder if we feel differently about being quoted by forwarding of messages, by quotation in an informal forum, in a spoken address, or in a formal published scholarly article? And whether the prospect of being quoted in print is likely to have any inhibiting effect on our wonderful dialogue?

I'd like to hear from both regular contributors and from anyone who might in the past have felt inhibited about posting something they thought should be said but which they weren't ready to commit themselves to for posterity. JAY.

-----

JAY LEMKE.

City University of New York.

BITNET: JLLBC@CUNYVM

INTERNET: JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU

## 16.2. Date: Tue, 12 Apr 1994 07:07:58 AST

From: "Russ Hunt" <HUNT@academic.stu.StThomasU.ca>

Subject: Re: Quoting xfamily messages

To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Jay raises a point that's come up on almost every list I've been involved in, at one point or another. There's no solution that satisfies everybody, but the one that makes the most sense to me is that we should expect (though obviously we can't enforce) that anyone quoted from a forum like this should have to right to refuse to be quoted, or to have the particular passage quoted. I occasionally say things in the heat of the moment which, on reflection, I not only wouldn't want quoted, but don't even agree with -- and that I'd never conventionally publish. But, as I said on a panel on "intellectual property" at the recent Conference on College Composition and Communication, I frankly don't think we have much control over the fate of electronic text.

What we can hope is that people get used to the difference between the considered nature of refereed publication and the ad hoc improvisational nature of electronic talk, and so, when the source is identified, consider it.

Jay's question seems to me quite appropriate --

> I particu-

- > larly wonder if we feel differently about being quoted by for-
- > warding of messages, by quotation in an informal forum, in a
- > spoken address, or in a formal published scholarly article?
- except that I'd add the question: do readers read differently in such circumstances?
- > And
- > whether the prospect of being quoted in print is likely to have
- > any inhibiting effect on our wonderful dialogue?

All I can say is that I haven't felt this inhibition. In fact, I wonder whether that peripheral awareness that what I'm saying is "public" in some sense doesn't put some salutary pressure on me, at the point of utterance.

-- Russ

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                                _|~_
Russell A. Hunt                _|~_)_ _)|~_  Learning and Teaching
Department of English          )_ __)_|_)__ __)  Development Office
St. Thomas University         | )____) |      EMAIL:hunt@StThomasU.ca
Fredericton, New Brunswick___|____|____|____/  FAX: (506) 450-9615
E3B 5G3  CANADA               \                / PHONE: (506) 452-0644
                                ~~~~~~

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### 16.3. Date: Tue, 12 Apr 1994 09:55 EDT

From: SERPELL <SERPELL@UMBC>  
 Subject: citation and renegotiability  
 To: xlchc@ucsd

One of the things I dislike most about the uncomfortable relations between the academic world and the "real world" is their tendency to generate a commoditization of ideas. This doesn't happen when I interact with people living in modest circumstances. It happens when big institutions commission individuals to do conceptual work for them.

Within the academic world there are a host of conventions that guard against plagiarism, misrepresentation, and other kinds of systematically distorted communication. But these conventions are not hard and fast rules. So they require constant renegotiation.

Over the past four years in which I have participated in the xfamily discussions I have enjoyed the frequent shifts of emphasis and perspective, and I agree with Jay Lemke that one of the main guarantors of that flexibility has been the convention that not only allows but actually encourages us to float half-baked ideas (excuse the mixed metaphor!).

Like Jay, I have received a number of requests for permission to cite things I've said ("posted") in this medium. Sometimes, also people ask whether I've published the same thought elsewhere in a more formal way. Citation serves a number of purposes, including acknowledgement of assistance/inspiration, legitimation by appeal to "authority", summarization, networking, etc. My feeling is that the conventions that we have already established about HOW to cite xfamily statements are adequate, and that we could perhaps help folks decide WHETHER and WHEN to cite this source by continuing to reflect publicly (i.e. in this medium, but maybe also sometimes in other media) on what is distinctive about it.

When deciding whether to cite xfamily discourse, my own criteria would run something like this:

1. Has it been said better or equally well by the same person "in print" ? If so, give preference to that more accessible and more enduring source. Check with the author to find out.
2. Does the author now feel s/he was mistaken and would rather not be cited as saying this ? If so, respect her/his preference. Check with the author to find out.
3. If the author is not accessible within a reasonable time-frame, make it clear that the context is a less-than-formal public forum, to protect the author's right to distance her/himself from the statement at a future date.

So much for my half-baked thoughts on citations from this half-baked, enormously enriching medium :-)

Robert

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Robert Serpell  
Psychology Department  
University of Maryland Baltimore County  
5401 Wilkens Avenue,  
Baltimore, MD 21228  
USA  
BITNET: Serpell@UMBC.BITNET  
INTERNET: Serpell@UMBC2.UMBC.edu

#### **16.4. Date: Tue, 12 Apr 1994 07:42:49 -0700**

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>  
Subject: examples  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Thanks for the reflections on representing the xfamily lists. I would find it helpful in the current state of things to have some examples of past citations before us. There are references in both the Danish book, The social subject, and Moll's Vygotsky and education. Might people post examples for us?

mike

Michael Cole

Communication Department and Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition  
MAAC 517 Second Floor, Q-092  
University of California, La Jolla, California, 92093

### **16.5. Date: Tue, 12 Apr 1994 12:09:12 -0700 (PDT)**

From: Mary K Bryson <brys@unixg.ubc.ca>

Subject: Re: Quoting xfamily messages

To: Jay Lemke <JLLBC%CUNYVM.BITNET@ucsd.edu> Cc: General Forum  
<XLCHC%UCSD.BITNET@ucsd.edu>

I must admit that I have a hard time reading messages with a *\*straight\** gaze- but the recent postings on quoting LCHC message bits strikes me as the most odd kind of privileged protectionism--

In my work, I find that my usual experience is that my writing or expressed ideas (such as they are) typically are plagiarized in the most obvious and explicit fashion.

The next tactic people use is to use footnoting, rather than an explicit textual citation.

Now, I don't want to sound like a one trick horse here, but I have chatted about this practice with other minority colleagues, and lo and behold it is a common complaint.

We are not cited enough and often are ripped off. We don't have access to the *\*construction\** of knowledge, and so we don't have *\*ideas\** or ownership rights.

I would love to be worried about being cited out of context!\

Who is worried about this practice?

Who has not so far written a message about being worried about this?

How come *\*we\** always have to bring up this thorny issue of exclusion and systemic bias.

As I write at the top of all my drafts--

Please cite this work without asking the author for permission.

Mary bryson

**16.6. Date: Tue, 12 Apr 94 15:27:00 PDT**

From: "Newman, Judith" <NEWMAN@bldgeduc.lan1.umanitoba.ca>  
Subject: Re: Quoting xfamily messages  
To: XLCHC <xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu>

I WAS ABOUT TO REPLY TO JAY THEN I READ RUSS' COMMENTS AND I AGREE WITH HIM. I THINK WE SHOULD EXPECT THAT ANYONE QUOTED FROM A FORUM SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT OF REFUSAL (WHICH MEANS THAT ETIQUETTE WOULD HAVE IT THAT WE SHOULD ASK PERMISSION TO QUOTE BEFORE QUOTING) BUT I ALSO THINK WE OUGHT TO ACCEPT THAT WHILE THIS WRITING IS RELATIVELY SPONTANEOUS IT IS IN THE "PUBLIC DOMAIN" AND THEREFORE WE DON'T HAVE MUCH CONTROL OVER IT'S FATE AS RUSS COMMENTED.

JUDITH NEWMAN  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

**16.7. Date: Tue, 12 Apr 94 15:32:00 PDT**

From: "Newman, Judith" <NEWMAN@bldgeduc.lan1.umanitoba.ca>  
Subject: examples  
To: XLCHC <xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu>

Thanks for the reflections on representing the xfamily lists. I

would find it helpful in the current state of things to have some examples of past citations before us. There are references in both the Danish book, The social subject, and Moll's Vygotsky and education. Might people post examples for us?

mike

-----

Mike,

You asked for examples. I quoted in "Interwoven Conversations" something Gordon had said on xclass in 1990, Jan 5 and cited it:

Wells, Gordon. 1990 xclass email communication. Jan5.

Gordon had outlined five beliefs which he felt shaped his teaching and they resonated for me. I think I asked his permission to quote him, but it's quite a while ago and I may not have. I can't remember precisely.

**16.8. Date: Tue, 12 Apr 94 19:21 PDT**

From: Rolfe Windward <IBALWIN@MVS.OAC.UCLA.EDU>



Subject: Quoting xfamily messages  
To: XLCHC General Forum <xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu>

Just a short note regarding Jay's concerns about formally citing messages from internet (xfamily) exchanges. I am vaguely aware there is some sort of protocol for such citations but have never really pursued it since I don't think it is reasonable, other than in "personal communication" style, to fix comments made in open conversation in the "stone" of formal discourse.

I have however, placed an endnote crediting certain individuals (Jay is one of them) with influencing the way I think about things. This "gives credit where credit is due" without, falsely in most cases I believe, implying that the information was abstracted from a formally exercised text.

Just my opinion of course.  
Rolfe Windward  
UCLA School of Education  
ibalwin@mvs.oac.ucla.edu

### **16.9. Date: Tue, 12 Apr 1994 19:48:20 -0700**

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>  
Subject: second requestd  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Jay and others. As indicated in a previous message, I would be helped A LOT if people who submit examples of explicit citations of xlchc discussions to see if there is a problem. There may be problems but that have not come to my attention. I think it would help a lot of know what the past community practices are, to see how they resonate, and THEN discuss whether or not there is a problem. It would be especially helpful if there is anyone who has been bothered by any citations they have seen accompanied by an explanation of what bothers them.

Or am I being dense and missing something here? Sclerosis of the cranium is always a threat!

mike

### **16.10. Date: Wed, 13 Apr 1994 10:26:27 +0200**

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)  
Subject: Re: Quoting xfamily messages  
To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

Aksel Mortensen, in his chapter "Notes on communication, activity theory, and zone of proximal development" in "The societal subject" (1993, ed. by Engelsted et al., Aarhus Univ. Press) has this quote in the reference section:

>Zinchenko, V.P (1991): Contribution to the 'xact-electronic-mail'-discussion  
>on >March 21 (on the network initiated by 'Laboratory of Comparative Human  
>>Cognition', University of California, San Diego).

I'd like to comment on the topic that I personally prefer things would settle towards the reasonable old form of the "personal communication".

When I want to give somebody credit for what s/he said in in a conference discussion or in a lecture or other oral (semi-)public statement I happen to write that person a letter asking for authorization to do that, giving the exact phrasing of my planned statement for information. Then the person has a chance to say no or yes or to qualify or change his/her utterance. We should treat e-mail messages like oral statements in semi-publicity. All the more since it is so easy to ask somebody by e-mail for authorization.

The credit might then take a form like this:

XY, Z. (19xx) Personal communication <date>, based on exchanges in e-mail  
forum <name of the list>.

XY, Z. (19xx) Personal communication <date>, based on his/her oral  
contribution to xy-conference in yz in 19xx.

When I get no answer in reasonable time, I change my statement into a passive anonymous form like "it has been pointed out / said / argued on occasion xy" without giving a name. When s/he says "no" and it is important in my context, I can still give the idea under the qualification "it can be argued / objected ...".

In fact, this form easily allows an interesting variant I hope we shall see increasingly often:

AB, C.; DE, F.; GH, I. & JK, L. (19xx) Idea / argument / insight / ... gained in co-operative e-mail exchanges on forum <name of the list> / in oral discussion at xy-conference in yz.

Nobody can ban from this (scientific) world promulgation and distortion of ideas with false or without credit. But everybody could stick to a scheme like the above in giving due and appropriate credit and thus heighten chances of being given due and appropriate credit (under whatever public sign the one or many active entities at the origin of an idea have chosen to be identifiable in the scientific community).

With old dreams of a better scientific community, Alfred

---

Alfred Lang lang@psy.unibe.ch  
Psychology, Univ. of Bern

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[next AL message](#)

### **16.11. Date: 13 Apr 94 11:27:37 SAST-2**

From: WF@education.uct.ac.za (Wendy Flanagan)  
Subject: citation  
To: XLCHC@weber.ucsd.edu

"We are not cited enough ... We don't have access to the construction of knowledge ..." (Mary Bryson).

I can and do relate to this. Isn't a formal citation in a written piece of work useful not so much to credit the originators insight etc so much, but rather to help an interested reader to track down relevant sources for further exploration?

Like Rolfe Windward, in my teaching and academic conversATIONS i TRY TO "GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE" by saying that the idea/information came from the xfamily network.

As to an example, I was dealing with group learning at the time when group learning was discussed in some detail. Many of the postings sharpened my own understandings and, I believe, made my teaching more coherent and useful. At this point it seems "silly" to cite sources.

As to wriiten work - In my own learning of Vygotskian approaches to pedagogy etc I have come to a quite different understanding of what "plaigirising" means - particulalrly as I work with students who use english as the language of instruction only. I regard their using of others' writings in a paraphrasing way as an attempt to learn at what Wertsch may call third level of intersubjectivity. That they are borrowing the phenomenol forms of what is being presented before being able to merge consciousness and personal meaning. I am always excited by this development when the paraphrasing is APPROPRIATE and assists the argument the student is trying to develop. Am I missing something in thinking this way?

### **16.12. Date: Wed, 13 Apr 1994 06:31:22 AST**

From: "Russ Hunt" <HUNT@academic.stu.StThomasU.ca>  
Subject: Re: second request  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Sounds to me as though Mike is suggesting that we're in search of a solution which actually has no problem.

I think I tend to agree. I don't know of a case in which someone has been quoted or cited from electronic discourse to anybody's detriment (not to say it hasn't happened, but I haven't seen it).

-- Russ

```

 |~
Russell A. Hunt _|~_)_ _)|~_ Learning and Teaching
Department of English)_ _)|_)_ _) Development Office
St. Thomas University |)_) | EMAIL:hunt@StThomasU.ca
Fredericton, New Brunswick___|___|___|___/ FAX: (506) 450-9615
E3B 5G3 CANADA \ / PHONE: (506) 452-0644
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### 16.13. Date: Wed, 13 Apr 1994 08:12:17 -0500 (EST)

From: GORD\_WELLS@OISE.ON.CA  
 Subject: Re: Referencing email  
 To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Judith did indeed ask my permission before quoting my message about teaching.

In a paper in press, I quoted K. Amano's translation of an extract from Budilova's *\*Philosophical Problems of Soviet Psychology\**. I asked his permission first and even suggested a minor revision of the translation, to which he agreed. The fact that he was the translator was acknowledged in the text and the citation in the reference section read: Budilova ..... Quoted, in translation, by K. Amano, E-mail XLCHC, 2 Jan 1991.

In the paper I gave at AERA, I referred to an argument advanced by Jay Lemke in the recent discussion on goals. In the text, I wrote: "As Lemke (e-mail, 29 Oct. 1993) has pointed out, ...." and, in the references, the citation was:

Lemke, J.L. (1993) When is a strategy? E-mail message, XLCHC, 29 October 1993. (This was the title Jay gave to his message).

My own feeling is that messages on email are in the public domain and are therefore quotable. However, I think it is important:

- a. to make clear that the source is email (and therefore not as "considered" as a regularly published paper), and
- b. to ask permission of the author and to accept her/his right to refuse.

Gordon Wells,  
OISE, Toronto.

**16.14. Date: Thu, 14 Apr 94 0:52:19 PDT**

From: Doug Williams <dwilliam@weber.ucsd.edu>  
Subject: Re: xfamily quotation  
To: XLCHC@UCSD.BitNet

Dear X-people:

This is slightly off the issue, but if I may add my 2-cents worth of comment, isn't this kind of an interesting paradigm crisis? We have very formal patterns that have evolved in academic citation, and also an implicit standard of formal logical presentation. In part this is predicated on the sheer difficulty involved in printing and distributing hard-copies of material.

E-mail discussions are so quick and easy, and so much like conversations yet also in print, that it doesn't fit the formal standards developed over time around print discussions.

What this style *\*does\** seem to resemble is the sort of half-oral, half-written scholarly tradition one finds in Rabbinic dialogues over the Talmud, in which one has the original text, and then half a dozen commentaries arguing over what the text means, and debating the meaning of earlier commentaries--including Rabbis changing or reinterpreting their own commentaries.

The question for me would be, should I stick to the traditions, or should I modify my expectations of what is acceptable academic discourse?

Having yielded to my impulse to comment, I will now return to the shadows . . .

Doug Williams

**16.15. Date: Thu, 14 Apr 1994 09:30 EDT**

From: SERPELL <SERPELL@UMBC>  
Subject: Copyright vs. dissemination  
To: xlchc@ucsd

Mary Bryson's remarks of April 12 struck an important chord for me. The issue is not confined to electronic communication.

A couple of years ago I was involved in a complex set of negotiations regarding the publication by a European NGO on behalf of an African NGO (Non-Governmental

Organization) of a document drafted by a gathering of African professionals, and designed to facilitate curriculum development by other African professionals.

The first draft that was sent to me for review (in my capacity as one of those who had collectively drafted it) bore the imprint:

"All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission by the" African NGO.

After some discussion and reflection on what the publication was supposed to achieve, the following text (borrowed from the Hesperian Foundation's 1977 publication of David Werner's book \*Where there is no doctor\*) was adapted for the version of our document that was eventually published:

"Any parts of this book, including the illustrations, may be copied, reproduced, or adapted to meet local needs, without permission from the author or publisher, \*provided the parts reproduced are distributed free or at cost - not for profit. For any reproduction with commercial ends, permission must first be obtained from the author or the publisher. The author would appreciate being sent a copy of any materials in which text or illustrations have been used."

I encourage others who feel likewise to hold out against their publishers' reflex commitments to the "copyright" formula.

Robert Serpell  
Psychology Department  
University of Maryland Baltimore County  
5401 Wilkens Avenue,  
Baltimore, MD 21228  
USA

**16.16. Date: Thu, 14 Apr 1994 08:29:15 -0700**

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>  
Subject: excellent statement Robert  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Robert-- I like your "handcrafted" alternative copyright statement a lot.

Thanks,

mike

Michael Cole

Communication Department and Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition  
MAAC 517 Second Floor, Q-092

University of California, La Jolla, California, 92093

**16.17. Date: Thu, 14 Apr 1994 10:16:32 -0700**

From: ematusov@cats.UCSC.EDU

Subject: Re: xfamily quotation

To: dwilliam@weber.ucsd.edu, XLCHC%UCSD.BITNET@ucsd.edu

Hello everybody--

Like Doug Williams, I want to add my 2 cents to discussion about how to refer to e-mail discussion in publication. I have extracted a several issues for the current discussion.

1. Technical issue: how to honest (i.e., what is a technique) in acknowledgment and referring to e-mail messages if an author wants to be honest. (If the author does want to be honest -- nothing can help:-)

2. Global issue: how (and why) to define personal contribution from collaboration (such as our network discussions). In some degree, this endeavor of tracking personal contributions contradict sociocultural theories of activity that insist that any original contributions are heavily rooted in contributions of other participants (current and former). In this regard, completely honest and exhaustive appreciation of others' ideas is impossible and even dangerous (because it separates people and destroys collaboration and trust -- it happens when people become preoccupied with competition of their contributions :-(- -- another depressing reality of our life). However, if, instead of exhaustive search for ownership of ideas, the issue is interpretation of others' ideas to move on, the problem of accurate reference become real and important one.

3. Genre issue. We have a conflict of genres. Publication is an atomized, completed utterance with strong authorship; while e-mail discussion is open flow of collaboration (I would call it the "first draft exchange" media). This issue is not new since relationship between publication and oral discussion is congruent. However, there are a few aspects e-mail discussions that differ them from oral discussions. First, unlike oral discussion and like publication, e-mail discourse is a text: its highly discrete, sequential and mediated by physical matter that can be stored, retrieved and accessed directly from any place (i.e., it has its "hard copy" that can be read again and again and by other people). E-mail discourse can be cut and paste, it can be taken out of time it actually happens.

Eugene Matusov

Univerisity of California at Santa Cruz

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## 17. English on the Internet 1994: 3 / 10

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### 17.1. Date: Mon, 2 May 1994 09:32:46 -0700

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>  
Subject: changing procedures  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Dear Colleagues-- I am going to enter into the community discussion in a somewhat awkward way.

A variety of changes in the research foci and associated funding are leading me to cut back on my physical support of networking activities. As a consequence, I am going to make a suggestion about a change in the structure of the xfamily lists and the way in which they will operate.

XLCHC has always operated as a reflector-list in which messages sent to the address automatically go to all members in such a way that everyone sees everything. There were a lot of reasons for doing this: it is perceived by users as userfriendly for beginners, it makes (sometimes painfully) visible to all the kinks and otherwise hidden garbage in the communication system. But it takes a good deal of person time.

We can afford less person time. So a change is needed.

After consulting with the xorgan group (those who signed up to be in on discussions of how the xfamily runs) we have settled upon the idea of creating a small set of listservers. Using listservers has virtues that reflector lists do not. For example, you will be able to obtain past message through ftp (file transfer protocol).

The preliminary set of new lists includes the following

xlchc (combination of xlchc, xhistory, xact) xedu (combination of xclass, xlit, xcomp)  
xgrad (non-phd's only)

xwork

xorgan

I emphasize that this set is preliminary, because such a re-mediation of the discourse must certainly have an effect on membership; we will be losing some



people. This community of practice (dare I use the term given how fraught it has displayed itself to be?) ought to voice its preferences, if it has them. Whenever one rearranges the heterogeneity in this manner, there is loss.

I am particularly concerned about the loss that will occur as a consequence of "computer literacy" levels among the xfamily's members. Some of us work in quite privileged environments, where a shift to a listserver is no big deal. Others of us do not. This issue will be critical, because the most efficient way to make the change is to cancel all the current lists and ask people to sign onto the listservers of their choice using the automatic procedure. We are currently talking about holding together a help system (xfamily) until things smooth out, but some disruption seems inevitable.

At this point the discussion of organizational matters is probably best handled in more collective fashion than xorgan permits, so please send comments to xlchc@ucsd.edu.

Perhaps this is a moment when the prior discussions about discourse and community can find their way into practice? mike

Michael Cole

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University of California, La Jolla, California

## **17.2. Date: Thu, 5 May 94 17:55:59 +0200**

From: ellen@hum.auc.dk (Ellen Christiansen)

Subject: a new beginning

To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

Just to say that it is amazing sitting here working in the evening sun in Denmark and witnessing the birth of a communication space, while at the same time speculating on a position paper written by Mike Robinson: "Supporting Social Dimensions in large Information Spaces", and revising the presentation of local research group on artefact mediation of learning in work and education. What a world is this?

Ellen

.....

Ellen Christiansen email: ellen@hum.auc.dk

Dept. of Communication

University of Aalborg

Langagervej 8

Box 159, DK-9100 Aalborg

DENMARK

.....

### **17.3. Date: Thu, 5 May 1994 09:08:31 -0700**

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>  
Subject: The Evening Sun  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

Hello Ellen C!

How lovely. While you sit in the evening sun I sit in the morning gloom that this coastal area of southern california produces this time of year. It cannot be accidental that my mind is on introducing a group of undergraduates to notion that human nature is created in communication while at the same time you are thinking about its technological leading edge.

technological leading edge. And along this leading edge (leading where?) new forms of discourse, new inter-human relations are "afforded."

Yet all the old power relations are always lurking somewhere in the background, inviting us to recreate the old, for fear of what the new will bring us. So you write in English, which you command, while I speak no Danish, nor is it likely that I ever will. Among the problems besetting my Russian colleagues is the abysmal knowledge of Russians by people outside Russia and its former allies--to a process of communication that at first feels strange they must put up with coding and decoding to get in and out of their alphabet. Yet even they have it easy compared to those who use ideographic systems of representation.

Enjoy the lengthening days and find time to write again!

mike

cole

### **17.4. Date: Thu, 5 May 1994 13:36:58 -0700**

From: Bonnie Nardi Via: Carnegie Corporation <xfamily@weber.ucsd.edu>  
Subject: Forwarded to list  
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu  
>To: xlchc-request@weber.ucsd.edu  
>From: nardi@taurus.apple.com (Bonnie Nardi)  
>Subject: Re: The Evening Sun

Ellen's lovely note and Mike's response lead me to speculate on our future shared virtual future and how we will enable communication. Mike writes about recreating

old social relations, with perhaps the implication that English is the language of the powerful. Another way to look at things is that English belongs to us all; it has become our lingua franca. That history reflects old power relations to be sure, but I see no reason to continue to worry about that; an evolution has occurred and we should see English as an international medium of communication, which it indeed is, rather than merely the native language of Americans, some Canadians, people in the U.K. and some others. English has been appropriated as the language of the world. It does not belong only to its native speakers. We need a common medium and that medium has arisen. English has a good track record as an amazingly porous language that freely takes in words and influences from other languages, and the cultures that speak English as a first language are quite open to this process. Here in California there is a great deal of Spanish influence and the process of linguistic change continues apace. And, as Mike pointed out, the alphabet is the most transparent inscription device of all those that have been tried in human history (though he didn't say it quite that way).

Having said that, I think we should, in the U.S. at least, find a way to foster the learning of a second language. We can all participate in multiple cultures, and we should be able to tap into the richness of another culture through its language. We may all speak English as our international language now and in the future, but that doesn't mean all the other languages are going away. Our beleaguered schools are unlikely to help with this problem; perhaps we will find a way to use the Internet to set up something like language pen pals with whom we can get practice in writing colloquial messages for at least that level of communication. Presumably each person could help the other with the language they are trying to learn. Having someone to communicate with would encourage us to listen to tapes to get the oral part of the language. In the future we'll have video conferencing and then we can really practice a second language with our "video pals."

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Bonnie

**17.5. Date: Fri, 6 May 1994 10:09:23 +0200**

From: e.ekeblad@ped.gu.se (Eva Ekeblad)  
Subject: Lingua franca  
To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

Hi again

I am resending. First version seems to have gone to Bonnie only... But I suppose it's OK to be a little disoriented in this transitional period.

>To:Carnegie Corporation <xfamily@weber.ucsd.edu>

>From:e.ekeblad@ped.gu.se (Eva Ekeblad)

>Subject:Lingua franca

>

>Hi

>

>Just felt a need to see where I am - where my responses go, and so on.

>

>This is a lovely morning in Sweden, and I ought not to be reading mail -  
 >that's a form of Thesis Avoidance, I suppose. I am writing in English, which  
 >is almost an of course to do here, and currently grappling with what people,  
 >mainly in the US, have REALLY been arguing about in math psychology. To me  
 >English as the presentday Latin is OK, but the mutuality of experience could,  
 >as Bonnie seems to say, be improved by born English-speakers having more  
 >second-language experience.

>

>Eva

nunununununununununununununununununununununununununununununununununun  
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## 17.6. Date: Wed, 11 May 1994 17:39:48 +0100

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)  
 Subject: Re: lingua franca and the "new" xlchc medium  
 To: xlchc <xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu>

Mike Cole, Bonnie Nardi, and others in their commendable attempts to make us feel the beginning of the new list technique anyway (thanks to Bob Coleman, it works well, so we do not feel it really), dream

>about recreating old social relations, with perhaps the implication that  
 >English is the language of the powerful. Another way to look at things is  
 >that English belongs to us all; it has become our lingua franca. That  
 >history reflects old power relations to be sure, but I see no reason to  
 >continue to worry about that; an evolution has occurred and we should see  
 >English as an international medium of communication, which it indeed is.

I tend, rather, to worry about that new lingua franca. Not so much because of possible asymmetric power relations (yes Latin was a powerful instrument in the

middle age, but eventually also a chance for divergent developments and enriched mutual exchange when it was finally dismissed), but mainly in view of the quasi-naturalness this communicative tidal wave is accepted worldwide. For what it promotes, especially in native English speakers, might be a sense of painless "participating" in other cultures that fringes on the illusionary. So when Bonnie Nardi writes:

>We can all participate in

>multiple cultures, and we should be able to tap into the richness of

>another culture through its language. We may all speak English as our

>international language now and in the future, but that doesn't mean all the

>other languages are going away,

I am tempted to call warning. Can we really participate in multiple cultures?

Yes we can be guests in another culture, one at a time. And as guests we might be treated in as polite as selective a way. We are seldom thrown out, even if we deserve. It is essential for any culture to have guests and for its members to be temporary guest in one or more other cultures. From the status of guest we can grow into a community membership by mutual acceptance. I think one cannot participate in a culture, but only become a guest or member in one or several communities and so experience and contribute to their culture.

How can one be a good guest or member without effort? So then, I think, I am privileged in being invited to participate in xlhc and especially privileged to have to make an effort in my second language. The return consists in a added sensitization for another culture and in turn for the riches of my own.

My first thought in view of the switch to the automatic list server was a kind of regret, naturally combined with the wish that this very special open and sensitive and warm climate of communication would persist. And also a sort of very abstract wish to have some gentle device built into that medium which would always remind us that mutual understanding is not just granted but presupposes an effort on part of all members, of guests to grow into the community culture, of old fellows to remain conscious of that wonder, a community of practice can be.

Good luck to the whole endeavor! Alfred

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Alfred Lang lang@psy.unibe.ch

Psychology, Univ. of Bern  
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[next AL message](#)

**17.7. Date: Wed, 11 May 94 09:22 PDT**

From: Gen Patthey-Chavez <IEQ2GXP@MVS.OAC.UCLA.EDU>  
Subject: Guesting it  
To: xlchc@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

Alfred,

I'm not sure I understand the difference between guesting it in another culture and participating in it - or is it the stance taken when interacting with others that you are trying to sensitize us about?

Genevieve

**17.8. Date: Thu, 12 May 1994 17:45:08 +0100**

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)  
Subject: Re: Guesting it  
To: xlchc <xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu>

Genevieve, you write:

> I'm not sure I understand the difference between guesting it in another  
> culture and participating in it - or is it the stance taken when interacting  
> with others that you are trying to sensitize us about?

Funny that you translate or shorten my "being a guest and perhaps becoming a member" into the simple English term "guesting". English is really a very special language. As are all others, of course. Each in its own way. But your question was probably raised by my:

> I think one cannot participate in a culture, but only become a  
> guest or member in one or several communities and so experience and  
> contribute to their culture.

which in turn was prompted by Bonnie Nardi's;

>> We can all participate in  
>> multiple cultures, and we should be able to tap into the richness of  
>> another culture through its language.

I don't know exactly, in turn, what you mean by "stance taken when interacting with others". If that should be, as my dictionary explains, "a firmly held point of view or way of regarding something", then my answer would be negative, at least as long as this attitude is not complemented by a large portion of openness and curiosity. Sure, you have to be sure of yourself to go into another culture; but if your stance is firm indeed, you'd better keep off. Anyway, I could not quite suppress, in a post on

communication among members of various cultures, my belief that presentday multicultural optimism needs a great deal of careful reflection.

But my intent in writing was much more modest. Perhaps. Also, there were no particular recent events on the platform at its base, I should assure you; jut very general musings. Communication nowadays is so easy, too easy. And communicative styles and quality on the different lists I had a chance to participate so far, is extremely various. XLCHC is an extraordinarily valuable platform. In the first 10 years of its existence it had real, though not necessarily manifest, persons between the members writing and the members reading. Now, since this has been taken over by a machine, the risk is greater that we just "communicate".

So if somebody could invent a device to add to the internet which could increase our awareness of how costly and irreplaceable mutual reaches really are, this would make me happy. Unfortunately, a typical solution of the computer minded could be to have a message appear on our screens, at random points in time and in randomly varying phrasing, such as:

your are talking to / reading a message from a real human being

or

there are real humans at the other end of this net

etc. etc.

Since we are all to some extent experts in human affairs, communication in particular -- couldn't we collectively invent means and tools to improve the humane character of computer netting?

In great curiosity, Alfred

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Alfred Lang lang@psy.unibe.ch  
Psychology, Univ. of Bern  
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### **17.9. Date: Sat, 14 May 1994 17:58:41 +0100**

From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)  
Subject: AL# Re: culture  
To: xlchc <xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu> CC: bluemli@psy.unibe.ch (Eugen Bluemli)

Sharon Tettegah writes:

>I recently read your comment about participating in another culture.  
>Could you please explain how you are defining culture. There are so many

>definitions these days. Perhaps I'm late, maybe this was discussed  
>previously.

I know of no fully satisfying definition of "culture", Sharon, at least for the context in question. But I can give you descriptors and add cautionary directives as I tend to use them in the project of designing a reasonable culture oriented psychology. It might run somehow like this:

Culture, in spite of being a noun term, should not be seen as a substantive entity but as well a process, perhaps as it is emphasized by the term Cultivation, but including the total system of conditions and results of that type of process. Culture is both a part or aspect of and a complement of a collective of humans, i.e. of a smaller or larger group. Culture is best described as a kind of memory of and for a group; but it should not be conceived as a static store but rather as a dynamic potential to be cultivated or developed in particular ways under particular circumstances. Cultural facts thus, by their special temporal and spatial characters slightly different from those of individual humans, are essential to understand development both in ontogenetic and sociogenetic perspectives, because they serve both functions of stabilizing and of dynamizing the psycho-social parts of a cultural group.

In analogy to instincts where an organism has a phylogenetically acquired dispositional knowledge about pertinent characters of its most probable environment as well as a set of operational dispositions to successfully deal with it under ordinary circumstances, culturality refers to the system of complementary structures within individual persons and "between" the persons of a group in question; while the external parts have been and are continually created, maintained and modified over the generations of a tradition, the complementary internal structures must be and are rather "naturally" built up in every single individual in the course of his/her life, especially in the early years. So culture is both the condition and continuous outcome of an evolutionary dialogue in psychosocio-cultural systems; as a process it is directed but open in its evolution and it is self regulative in time. Humans, both as individuals and as groups, are both creatures and creators of their culture; they cannot live without.

If you want to speak of a culture in contrast to another -- and this is what is at stake in questions of comparison and in being a guest --, then you could speak of degrees of affinity between a set of selected structures (memories in the above sense) within as well as between a number of persons, i.e. the enculturated brain-mind and the observable cultural facts in the narrower sense, respectively. Any single person thus, under ordinary life circumstances, is, to different affinity degrees, part of several or many specific culturalities or culture\_s\_, sub- or supercultures, say, for example, friendship, family, play group, work group, neighborhood, townhood, citizenship, religious bond, ethnic group, linguistic community etc. etc.



You can roughly say that the members of a particular culture have relatively more in common among themselves than with members of comparable other cultures. But that is not only difficult to deal with empirically; it is also risky because this consideration can lead to spuriously oppose different culturalities of a single person. At present it is an open question whether, if you imagine degree of affinity (something like scope and intensity of membership combined) as a function of group size to which a person culturally belongs, you would get a relatively smooth curve: i.e. larger group size, the smaller degrees of affinity. While earlier observers tended to believe in such a function showing steep slope and few but definite steps (you belong to perhaps a family, a township, and ethnic and a religious culture, and that's it), contemporary observers would be more careful and assume a flatter and smoother function (people belong to very many cultural assemblies at the same time and that changes continually, if indeed they belong at all). This difference might be in part the result of a factual change of cultural systems through recent time and in part be due to keener observation and more careful theorizing. Some would even question the existence of such a thing called culture or discount it as a fiction. But this, in my opinion may be just the result of unjustifiably reifying cultural processes and structures in either objective or subjective terms.

All this maybe not very satisfying to you when you expect just a definition of culture. What I have hopefully entered you is a sort of constructive or conditional-genetic (to use Kurt Lewin's term) "definition": I have tried to have you observe what I think could happen to people living in culture. I think that an evolution-affine semiotic such as that inaugurated by Charles Peirce is essential in describing the process. I also think that we will not really understand the cultural process as long as we are caught in the various dualisms such as mental vs. material or subjective vs. objective or values vs. facts. But perhaps this goes much beyond of what you wanted to know.

With best regards, Alfred

PS: I started adding my initials marked with # at the beginning of the subject line of my messages to lists and would recommend such a habit to everybody on the list. The reason is that it makes it easier to recognize this or that particular message in lists of posts with only the list name as the sender besides date and subject.

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Alfred Lang lang@psy.unibe.ch  
Psychology, Univ. of Bern  
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[next AL message](#)

**17.10. Date: Sat, 14 May 94 09:46 PDT**

From: Rolfe Windward <IBALWIN@MVS.OAC.UCLA.EDU>  
Subject: RW# Re: culture

To: XLCHC Forum listserver <xlchc@UCSD.EDU>

Many thanks to Alfred for his explication of culture. For some reason it reminded me of a metaphor for sanity/in-sanity that I heard long ago. If we think of culture as the living, nutrient rich sea in which our existence is constituted and supported then sanity can be defined in a rather straightforward way as the ability to swim.

For some reason, the imagery of that metaphor has always remained with me, perhaps because the imagery of its converse is so terrible.

Rolfe Windward

UCLA School of Education

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## 18. Shared objects 1994: 1 / 9

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### 18.1. Date: Tue, 21 Jun 1994 23:29:49 -0700

From: ematusov@cats.ucsc.edu  
Subject: Re:Meta-collaboration  
To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

(huge text)

Hello everybody--

I want to continue our great discussion of collaboration.

1. On Thu, 16 Jun 1994, Arne Raeithel wrote:

"You say that you think that common ground and co-regulation of action are neither necessary nor sufficient for collaboration. I would agree at once if only I knew some sufficient conditions (do you have them listed already?)."

Arne, I know that I am guilty for provoking and contributing to a discussion about what is "real" collaboration and what is not, although I have stated earlier that I think this discussing might mislead us. I am not against attempts to define the concept of collaboration as Jay Lemke (June 16), Yrjo Engestrom (June 16), and Gordon Wells (June 17) did (see my comments on their contributions below) rather I am against any construction of a superficial "objective" test of the presence of collaboration.

Like for the concept of learning, there is no privilege position for defining the presence of collaboration. Rogoff, Lave, and other sociocultural folks have demonstrated that in regard of learning, there is no "objective" perspective on what is curriculum of an ongoing activity, what is educational agenda, and what is evidence of learning. Before this sociocultural perspective, teacher's curriculum was objectified as the educational agenda. Lave and Wenger introduced notions of teacher's curriculum and student's curriculum. It is possible to add observer's curriculum as well. The point is that all these curricula or educational agendas are real and valuable. Penelope Eckert's (1989) analysis of Burnouts, high school "misfits," shows that Burnouts' educational agenda (i.e., socializing in working class practices) does not match with institutional agenda overtly oriented to middle class practices. From the latter perspective, Burnouts are school failures; but from the former perspective, Burnouts are doing OK. There is no objective or "as matter of facts" curriculum. This does not mean that we cannot judge an activity but we

should be aware of non-objective character of the judgment grounded in the practices we are committed.

If, traditionally, learning has been defined as growing match between educational agenda defined by educational authority (e.g., teacher, parent) and student's activity, then collaboration has been defined as growing accord between people. Traditional question is what are objective criteria for such accord. According a sociocultural participation approach, there is no THE curriculum but instead there is a diversity of learning agendas (e.g., teacher's, students', institutional, community, researcher's). Similarly, there is a diversity of accords defined as collaboration by the participants and observers (who also can be considered as remote participants). Consider Edouard Lagache's example (June 16):

" An example that I think Eugene would agree with me of Meta-collaboration is a set of electronic mail exchanges I've been having with fellow student in my department. Filled with end of school year emotion, I sent a very philosophical note to my department (My quote in my signature file comes from it). This student sent me a very caustic note back stating that my philosophical proclamations were false. I replied, defending myself and asking him to defend his position. This exchange has continued and evolved into a very interesting example of dialog among opposing views. He still dogmatically cognitive, and I am very much the opposite. But we just finished visiting Hume, and I'm still pushing on toward post-modernism. I'll keep the net posted on my successes! In this case we have a dialog between opposing viewpoints, but with a shared investment in the conversation and a commitment to further exchange for the common good of both participants. .... there is a clear intention on both parties to a joint project - in this case a conversation. "

I doubt that Edouard's opponent would describe the joint activity he and Edouard are involved in same terms as Edouard did. Edouard's description of their accord reflects his sociocultural position. Edouard's opponent would probably describe their accord from a positivist perspective as an endeavor of seeking the objective truth. I, as an observer of their discussion, argue that they don't just use different terms for the description the same phenomenon but they mean and describe different phenomena. There is no privilege perspective on the activity that transcends the activity.

2. Vera John-Steiner wrote on June 18:

"My experience is that it is necessary to distinguish between differing patterns of collaboration and that one of the very important ones is inclusive collaboration which specifies the dimension of the interpersonal co-construction as well as the joint, focused, renegotiated activities of long-term partners in dialogue and/or "co-production."

There is another trend in a traditional view on collaboration and learning. Besides attempt to "discover" objective test for the presence of learning and collaboration in joint activity, it applies exclusively microgenetic, interactive methodology for study learning and collaboration. Learning is usually viewed as an immediate outcome of direct interaction between teacher and student; while collaboration is considered as a type of interaction. In a sociocultural participation approach, the process of learning might transcend any concrete activity and immediate interaction. Learning is defined not only by past and present by also by long-term future. For example, if we ask a former undergraduate student what s/he has learned from her/his undergraduate course of Cognitive Development, I am sure the answer would strongly depend on the student's career after her/his graduation of the school. From a traditional point of view, this phenomenon is explained by saying that learning that has happened and completed in the class on Cognitive Development differently interacts with the students career. From a sociocultural perspective, learning in the class is not limited by the class and by immediate interaction with the instruction but transcends both class and instruction.

Similarly, I argue that collaboration is not limited by immediate interaction. The participants of joint activity can continue define and redefine their accords in a joint activity far after their concrete joint activity. Jay Lemke wrote on June 16:

"I don't think of myself as much of an expert on "collaboration", having done it (participant viewpoint) but never studied it (observer viewpoint), at least not in its most culturally normative forms."

I guess by the word "observer" Jay meant broader types of observations that not limited to observation of microgenetic observations but include a wide spectrum of ethnography (did you, Jay?). Although I don't argue here against studying microgenetic interaction, I see a danger of focusing exclusively on studying it and disregarding a broader context and remote collaboration.

3. Jay wrote on June 16:

"Perhaps the solution does lie in the object-orientation, where "object" means not telos but the materiality of the mediational means, and generally of the actions/products of the other participants. What distinguishes collaboration most specifically perhaps is its orientation to the partner as object/subject. In a true collaboration, we have an interest in the projects of the partner in part because they are those of this specific partner, and not just because we have an independent interest in their content.

In this way, collaboration is defined, not so much by its goals or products, nor even by joint activity, as by an orientation in activity which integrates the product- or project- orientation with a person-orientation, and so leads not just to the joint production of products or accomplishment of projects, but to the joint construction of identities, to a mutuality in the making of one's self and one's partner. Rather on

the model of interpersonal relationships than on the model of industrial production."

In my interpretation, Jay's attempt to construct a definition of "true" collaboration is based on the opposition between, I would say, "communal" collaboration and "service-exchange" collaboration (oriented to "the model of industrial production" in Jay terms). In general, like Vera, I am rather sympathetic to Jay's endeavor to distinguish different types of collaboration, but I want to reserve at least two concerns. First, I want to have a concept that embraces both "good" and "bad" types of collaboration -- actually any types of collaboration (for this purpose I have introduced the term of "meta-collaboration"). Second, I see further split of Jay's "communal" collaboration in two other types of collaboration reflecting notions of closed community and open community which we discussed a month or so ago. It seems to me that Jay's notion of "joint construction of identities" might lead to the notion closed community; while his notion of interest in the partners as a source of creativity, help, and diversity might lead to the notion of open community.

4. Gordon Wells wrote on June 17:

"It struck me that this definition [Jay's definition of "communal" collaboration - EM] could function as the specification of the conditions necessary for "working in the ZPD". It's certainly a good description of classrooms in which there is genuinely collaborative learning and teaching - whether at primary or postgraduate level."

I absolutely agree with Gordon that Vygotsky's notion of ZPD appears to be designed to stress learning and guiding aspects of collaboration. However, in the context of our current discussion, it is unclear whether we should stick only with "good" ZPD corresponding to collaboration in an open community or we should include "bad" ZPD (like that one that was described by Penelope Eckert in the case of Burnouts' participation in school) as well. I personally incline to the latter proposal rather than to the former one.

5. On June 16, Yrjo Engestrom wrote:

"...I find it more useful to look for collaboration in interactions where the different parties at least instinctively searching for or trying to construct something like a shared object. This can and does indeed include conflict, competition etc. as ingredients of 'collaboration' - for the lack of a better word."

I agree with Yrjo's attempt to include different types of collaboration in the definition (not only "good" but also "mean" ones). However, I am not sure that the notion of construction of "a shared object" as a definition of collaboration captures openness, diversity, and dynamics of collaboration. I have a great concern of using the concept of "shared-ness" for defining collaboration or intersubjectivity because it seems to me that the concept of "shared-ness" is based on overlapping of subjectivities which is very much individualistic. I can't believe that the core

interest that people have in each other is to "share" something, i.e., to unify or even, pushing to an extreme, to collapse in each other. If we shift from an individualistic perspective on individuals to participation one, we can define collaboration as a process of individuals' contribution to the activity (i.e., collaboration is defined here through a way how the participants contribute to the activity). This approach contrasts with defining collaboration through a comparison of individuals with each other to find growing overlapping between them. In brief, although I recognize that participation in collaboration with particular partners might facilitate their future collaboration, I doubt that this important aspect of collaboration is the core feature of collaboration.

6. Like Mike Cole, I can't pass by Eva Ekeblad 's wonderful cite of Skinner (on June 17):

"(1) convert nouns into verbs whenever possible to get back to actual processes (e.g. to know rather than knowledge),

(2) convert "powers" and "abilities" into the behavior for which they are said to be responsible (e.g. observing rather than powers of observation),

(3) drop gratuitous physiologizing (sense-organs and brain),

(4) then reformulate "observing," "reflecting," "judging," and "reasoning" in terms of the behavior which is said to result from them." (Skinner, 1983, p. 424)

I see one of common threads connecting behaviorism and a sociocultural approach in behaviorist recognition of observer. For structuralism and traditional cognitive science (i.e., information processing theories), the issue of observer does not exist (like in Aristotle's physics): if a description of a phenomenon can fit (i.e., "predict") the phenomenon, the description is considered to truly portray the phenomenon mechanism (e.g., from the fact that the notion of "short-term memory" describes well people's forgiveness of recently exposed information it is made a conclusion that people "possess short-term memory"). Behaviorist struggle with mentalism was in part a recognition of observer who can only register processes. A sociocultural approach also recognizes observer but unlike behaviorism that tried to construct the universal observer (like in Newton's physics), a sociocultural approach recognizes a diversity of observers.

Eugene Matusov

University of California at Santa Cruz

**18.2. Date: Sat, 25 Jun 1994 13:43:29 +0200 (MET DST)**

From: raeithel@rzdspc1.informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)

Subject: Shared objects

To: xlchc@UCSD.EDU

Eugene writes on Tue, 21 Jun 1994:

----- quote Matusov -----

I have a great concern of using the concept of "shared-ness" for defining collaboration or intersubjectivity because it seems to me that the concept of "shared-ness" is based on overlapping of subjectivities which is very much individualistic. I can't believe that the core interest that people have in each other is to "share" something, i.e., to unify or even, pushing to an extreme, to collapse in each other.

----- end quote -----

I do not think that "to share" means unity among subjects. Consider the term "share-holders" from the financial sphere.

Each one holds his own share, doesn't he?

In German, we could say: ein gemeinsamer Gegenstand (a common object), or ein geteilter Gegenstand (an object everyone has a part of = a shared object where everyone has his/her share) without much discernible difference between the two formulations. This is because "gemeinsam" also has the root of \*dividing\*, e.g. dividing time equally for letting any one's cattle graze on the commons (shared greenlands).

Thus, a shared object in Yrjo Engestrom's sense does not call for any spiritual or bodily unity among the shareholders. Rather, the unity \*of the object\* is much more important than any unity among the subjects. In this type of collaboration people aim at reproduction of the concrete unity of a state of affairs, and it could very well be an antagonistic ("parallel" or "anti-parallel") type of co-production in which the aims are superficially totally different. Of course, this entails that the common object is seen/treated differently by the collaborators.

In the case of Skinner and Chomsky, there is the common object of modeling language, and gaining the authority to explain it to lay people. The difference in treating language is very marked indeed, yet there is no disagreement in the unity of the object itself. By advancing competing theories for the same phenomenon it is at the same time stabilized, reproduced, and eventually developed as a unity.

Eugene seems to have a very similar idea of co-production when he goes on, right after the above:

----- quote Matusov -----



If we shift from an individualistic perspective on individuals to participation one, we can define collaboration as a process of individuals' contribution to the activity (i.e., collaboration is defined here through a way how the participants contribute to the activity).

----- end quote -----

My point here is just that the wider sense of "sharing" does seem to capture this, too. However, one should not overstretch the meaning. To call Bosnia the shared object of all the warring parties in Ex-Yugoslavia would not be permissible, for instance. There has to be some sort of commonly accepted parceling out of the shares to call the co-production a collaboration, surely.

Arne.

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Arne Raeithel  
Dept of Psychology  
University of Hamburg

### **18.3. Date: Sun, 26 Jun 1994 06:35:37 -0700**

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>  
Subject: on sharing  
To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

People interested in the issue of commonality/sharing might find interesting the volume edited by Resnick, Levine, and Teasley called *Socially Shared Cognition* published by APA a couple of years ago. It contains articles by Hutchins, Lave, Rogoff, and several others. The following fragment from my commentary in that volume resorts to the simple minded ploy of consulting the dictionary, which is sometimes a helpful starting point.

mike cole

PS. There is an active group of anthropologists who emphasize that culture is only very partially shared even in relatively bounded groups, which is one of the reasons why constructivists often wonder ( a point emphasized by Durkheim) how society is possible at all. Schegloff and Krauss in the Resnick et al volume address this issue

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The simple expedient of referring to Webster's Dictionary reveals something of the Janus-headed nature of this concept. On the one hand sharing means to "receive, use, experience in common with another or others." This is the sense of share in force when we ask that two children share the use of the family TV, or when two

adults share a taxi. On the other hand share also means to divide or distribute something, as in "Would you like to share this batch of cookies?" or "Who is willing to share the burden of this committee work?"

What makes the concept really interesting with respect to the notion of "sharing cognition" is that sharing often means both "having in common" and "dividing up" at the same time (as a re-examination of the examples just given will show). This possibility raises all sorts of interesting questions for cognitive psychologists: What does it mean for a cognitive process to occur both "in" and "between" individuals? In so far as cognition is shared in the distributed sense, where might it be located? In the social group? In the culture? In the genes?

#### **18.4. Date: Sun, 26 Jun 1994 16:20:10 +0200 (MET DST)**

From: raeithel@rzdspc2.informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)  
Subject: Common objects and parallel monologues  
To: xlchc@UCSD.EDU

----- quote Lemke -----

What makes a community is interaction, not similarity.  
What makes a culture is inter-articulability of practices,  
not homogeneity of practices.

----- end quote -----

This is very true. In my early school hours in the Ruhrgebiet, which is the prototype Industrial Landscape of Germany, "we" were the protestants against the catholics as long as school lasted, then "we" were of the people who did the work (of both religions), as contrasted to the rich and lazy ones of the Villenviertel Schnabelhuck - big mansions, and gardeners protecting the weakling rich. Then "we" could be the odd ones (of all economic classes), e.g. those of Polish origin, or moved here recently from Bavaria, Italy, or the United Kingdom -- against the indigenous Rhinelanders. Still later, "we" were the intellectuals and natural scientists of my parent families (mother and father) who habitually listen to the radio and discuss some new concept like "co-existence between different ideologies" from half past nine to sleeping time (1955) ...

It is typical of the Ruhrgebiet that its inhabitants manage to interarticulate all of these wildly diverging horizons. But it is also true that at the fringe of that region we find the town of Solingen where confessedly some young German males have set fire to a house, and thereby burnt a Turkish family to death, in 1993.

----- quote Lemke -----

Conflict is made possible by precisely the same grounds  
that makes cooperation possible:  
engagement with a common object,

including [engagement] with the Other as that object.

But the object is

both "common" or shared or "the same"

and also not so.

What is "the same" I believe is the materiality of the object,  
the common point of interaction.

But what is not usually the same is the meaning  
which that material object has for the participants.

Each will see it somewhat differently,

engage with it through somewhat different practices.

Each will orient to it from the perspective of playing  
a different role in the activity.

----- end quote -----

"Common": also means -- the usual thing, what everybody knows or does, a  
derogatory label used by the aristocrats and educated cynics.

And this, too: Our "common cause", countrymen, comrades, co-fighters...

----- quote Lemke -----

[Normally, ...] at any given moment the participants are not generally  
playing identical roles and enacting the same practices.

There is an interesting exception to this, the functional variant of  
"parallel monologues" [...], namely mass parallel activity.

When all sing together, chant together, exercise together, march together,

when we are all, usually temporarily and ritually ONE,

performing exactly the same actions at the same time,

there occurs a peculiar highlighting of the paradox of  
unity-through-heterogeneity

in an exceptional moment of artificial homogeneity.

But these activities are not I think cooperative in our usual sense.

----- end quote -----

If they were, in our usual sense, we would have to admit that Nazi troopers'  
parades, May 1st power shows on the Red Square, and other variants of mass  
movement are cooperative phenomena. However, the characterization as parallel  
monologues rules this out. There is no inter-articulation, there is only a drive...

----- quote Matusov -----

to unify or even, pushing to an extreme, to collapse in each other.

----- end quote -----

This is very unhealthy. The French psychoanalyst, Chasseguet-Smirgel has taught me this in her book "Ueber-Ich und Ich-Ideal" (German translation, possibly called "Super-Ego and Ideal Self" in the English one).

A nice sunday for you-all...

Arne.

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Arne Raeithel  
Dept of Psychology  
University of Hamburg

### 18.5. Date: Sun, 26 Jun 1994 22:17:15 +0100

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)  
Subject: Re: Shared objects  
To: xlchc <xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu>

I enjoyed both, Eugenes recent concerns about the concept of "shared-ness" for defining collaboration and, I generalize, in defining culture as the shared knowledge, customs, sign systems, objects etc., as well as Arne's caveats, that to share does not imply unity among the subjects sharing, which he illustrated with the share-holder example and de-constructed through the Bosnia example of the shared interest of warring parties.

The somewhat wry reason for my enjoyment lies in the point that this discussion, for me at least, makes clear that metaphors as replacements for scientific theories do not really help from a certain point on, and they might even stand in the way of understanding processes of people-culture relations. Please, excuse my feelings here, if you find them out of place; they are not meant to hit anybody's theorizing, but rather to further our understanding of practices of community and culture.

I have another example of the same kind which, for me, demonstrates the futility of that kind of reasoning even clearer. It is the often used metaphor of \*identity\* or \*identification\* in matters of self, group adherence, cultural processes such as when architects and others in their suit claim that people should be able to "identify" with some architectural style or item and in fact would really claim to do so with their favorite architectural creations. "Identification" appears just a furthergoing metaphor than the "Sharing" notions of something which has been discussed on this platform in connection with collaboration, community etc. Am I really supposed to feel or think or otherwise cognize my identity with a house or with a tool or with a language or with an idea, etc. etc.? Non, I do not feel like being a house, nor am I simply an idea. What would "identity" mean in such phrases. "Sharing" of objects, tools or space for coordinated use over time appears reasonable, but sharing an

idea or a right or a specific cultural process can only be metaphorical. If we use the idea as a replacement of a theory, I think, we have fallen into some kind of newspeak, and, like politicians, we might use it because it so nicely covers up something which we do not understand but want our profit of. (I see that Jay Lemke has taken care of the political aspects of the sharing and identity metaphors, so I need not dwell on the reality of that trap. "Those who are not for me, are against me!" This must sound better in older English than my translation from German.)

How could the metaphor of sharing be translated to make sense in the context of bio-psycho-socio-cultural life? I cannot give full answer. What I might propose, here, is only the rudiments of a conceptualization that perhaps can better avoid metaphoric traps.

I tend to think, that on the one hand, "sharing" or "identifying with" must mean something like "to make use of the item in question", while others can and may or should do something similar. When I share a cultural habit (to take this phrase for the general case of what we talk about here), I use it, I profit from using it, because it not only can bring immediate returns; but it also turns me into one of the same; it may make or show me somehow adjusted; it lightens all the difficulties of interaction; it displays and assures me as a member of the group, from my own viewpoint as well as for that of others, etc. etc. However, that can be at most half of the story. When I make use of a cultural habit, I also contribute to the very existence of the respective cultural system: this is a very essential service and not at all comparable to the shareholder's or object sharing case. For, if nobody would use or execute those particular cultural habits, there would be no culture of that kind at all and no new members of that group could recruit; while, when everybody would give his share in some object matter up, there remains that object shared and somebody will laughingly take hold of it alone. A museum collection of a culture, however fine and complete, cannot revive that culture. And then, do I use or perform a cultural habit slavishly, just as it is given? I think this to be a limiting case only. Yes, there may be customs that have gotten petrified; but those, in the extreme at least, are risky to any living culture. Cultural patterns have to be varified, recognizable but slightly different; they have to be played with in terms of profferences and withdrawals from those not accepted and taken up by others in the community. the culture process is one of continuous variation and selection. But profference of variations and processes of selection are, in my opinion, more than just a necessity for innovation -- for wich it is essential, anyway --, but it is also a requirement for a living culture or community.

I use the term *\*affinity\** to describe those conditions and the results of community processes as a part of a semiotic conception. Cultural structures, i.e. that what endures of communal practice, whether it is memory, habits, patterns within persons or collective memories among and between them, in whatever form they exist, must be to some extent affine among each other, if some such communal process is to maintain itself. If they, or we, are of too low affinity, we become indifferent to each other; if too high, we approach being victim of necessities.

I cannot here fully explicate this conception of affinity. But, I should like to ask: would you feel it to be abstract enough to be a good candidate for a scientific concept or do you smell another metaphorical trap. At least it is polysemic to quite an extent. Naturally, the word itself can be seen as metaphorical with its connotations of topographic bordering, biotic relationship or emergence, chemical valencies etc. In any case, I think it an interesting candidate to gather all those various aspects of relations that take place in practice of communities that Eugene and others have so forcefully and convincingly evocated in earlier posts, such as interactions operating on similarites, complementarities, contrasts, contiguities, etc. etc. among the relata of such dynamic systems. The concept of affinity dwells on the idea that heterogeneity cannot be found except on the background of homogeneity and vice versa, and, perhaps, each of those two phenomena even emerges from the other in the sense of high degrees of similarity inducing diversifying counter-effects and increasing diversity leads to a sort of watershed where things go either back to new homogeneity or to some separation into a new system, and often both effects occur together.

With best regards, Alfred

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Alfred Lang lang@psy.unibe.ch  
Psychology, Univ. of Bern  
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### **18.6. Date: Sun, 26 Jun 1994 23:37:32 -0500 (EST)**

From: SERPELL <SERPELL@UMBC2.UMBC.EDU>  
Subject: Re: on sharing  
To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

mike cole asks:

"What does it mean for a cognitive process to occur both "in" and "between" individuals? In so far as cognition is shared in the distributed sense, where might it be located? In the social group? In the culture? In the genes? "

How about in the communication ?

Robert

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Robert Serpell  
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## 18.7. Date: Mon, 27 Jun 1994 13:50:31 +0100

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)

Subject: AL# Re: on sharing

To: xlchc <xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu>

>mike cole asks:

>'What does it mean for a cognitive process to occur

>both "in" and "between" individuals? In so far as cognition is

>shared in the distributed sense, where might it be located? In the

>social group? In the culture? In the genes? '

Robert Serpell adds:

>How about in the communication ?

My answer to Mike's question would point out that we have no good language to ask (therefore the quotes around "in" and "between") and even less so to reasonably answer it. Robert's suggestion only leads to a valid description if "communication" is very broadly conceived: no intention, no addressing, no code etc. required, though possible. And this answer might introduce a bias against cognitives processes "within" individuals, that pet of psychologists which we would not really want to let die, but rather see it as some exemplars of a larger herd.

My attempts at an answer would therefore start with the construction of internal and external structures within one and the same language or conceptuality. This is a principle Kurt Lewin proposed already in the late Twenties. Only then shall we have a chance to adequately describe also the processe we provisionally term "cognitive" that are going "out from" any individual and the processes that are effective "into" one or several individuals, i.e receptive and effective processes. It seems to me that this conceptuality must be capable of comprehending phenomena like the social group, culture, the genes, and communication an some more by describing those as specifics of one common conception.

My choice of trying that comprehensive type of description or comprehension is a version of Peircean semiotic. The reason for this choice mainly lying in its potential of avoiding both materialistic and linguistic or mentalistic reduction.

The above is also intended to respond to Brian Hazelhurst's:

>It seems to me that the "cultural models" tradition has not (yet?) successfully  
>tackled the dynamics of culture and cognition. Cultural models, by their very  
>nature as mental objects, don't include the rich world of action as mechanisms  
>for their own existence -- there is no (or, little) role played by history,  
>social negotiation, and material constraints upon the processes of knowing  
>(this argument is made in the dissertation).

Alfred

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Alfred Lang lang@psy.unibe.ch  
Psychology, Univ. of Bern  
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### **18.8. Date: Tue, 28 Jun 1994 17:56:06 +0200**

From: e.ekeblad@ped.gu.se (Eva Ekeblad)  
Subject: Sharing  
To: xlhc@weber.ucsd.edu

Hi out there.

I'd like to share this venerable quote with you:

"To make words serviceable to the end of communication, it is necessary that they excite, in the Hearer, exactly the same IDEA, they stand for in the mind of the Speaker. Without this, Men fill one another's heads with noise and sounds; but convey not thereby their Thoughts, and lay not before one another their Ideas, which is the end of discourse and Language.

John Locke: "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding" as quoted by Roy Harris (1988), Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein. How to play games with words. London: Routledge.

This (what Harris terms "telementation") seems to be what quite a lot of us are wriggling to get out of our system, out of our theories, out of our metaphors, out of our discourse. As Jay Lemke confesses:

>Forgive me if I keep trying to say this in different ways in dif-  
>ferent contexts. I'm still trying to get used to it myself.

I must, too, ask your forgiveness: for resorting once more to Skinner, whose career-long struggle with verbal self-discipline has fascinated me so. Originally I noticed this theme in his autobiographies and thought it might be useful as a hammer of



ridicule towards the kind of academic worries about terminology best characterized as disguised attempts at orthodoxy: forcing ones own understandings upon others (rather than realizing that "meaningful miscommunication and recovering from it" is what brings our thinking forwards).

Reading Skinner more carefully I found that there was certainly material for making him look ridiculous - and others prescribing conformity along with him. But I also found that Skinner himself skilfully presented Skinner-as-a-young-behaviorist-bigot in a humoristic light - indeed, a flattering contrast to himself as a resignedly-mature author (he even made me believe in the seriousness of that rhetorical trick). I also came to respect his tenacious belief in the possibility to condition his verbal behavior in accordance with his theories - even if his definition of objectivity rested upon the assumption of an universal observer, instead of the diversity of observers that we seem to be diversely collaborating to establish an objectivity upon - if I'm not completely misunderstanding Joseph Ransdell:

>Objectivity is primarily a characteristic of communicational practice,  
>such that in urging greater objectivity (when and if that is indeed  
>appropriate, as it may not always be) one is simply urging, rightly or  
>wrongly, that more emphasis be placed on the referential and  
>cross-referential dimension of the communication, on the basis of a  
>belief that whatever the communication is or could be facilitating is  
>not in fact being facilitated by the communicational practice as it is  
>presently conducted and the fault lies in the feebleness or  
>incompetence of the referential dimension of the communication.

And I came to realise, more as an afterthought to the paper I wrote, that being serious about how we say things might in a sense be a way of changing our future practice (intending no magic, I assure you).

Eva Ekeblad

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**18.9. Date: Tue, 28 Jun 1994 12:54:38 -0500 (CDT)**

From: HDCS6@Jetson.UH.EDU

Subject: sharing

To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

I have been thinking about sharing since reading about it on the network. I was in a very practical meeting today with a school principal and we were discussing how to share a particular curriculum with teachers. She turned to me and said, "Sharing? Sharing only goes on when everybody gets something out of it." Of course she was talking on a very basic, pragmatic level. But it made me think, maybe some of the definitions of sharing are too global and too abstract. Maybe the way you understand sharing is by understanding what people get out of the interaction. If you don't get anything out of an interaction you don't share. I don't know, from a purely philosophical stand point it sort of sends a shiver up and down my spine. But I saw the other people around the table immediately agreeing with the principle and the conversation turned to what we should do in terms of payoff to make sure the teachers shared what we wanted them to share. It also made me wonder about my own motives. What am I getting out of getting the teachers to share. Anyway, just a passing thought.

Michael Glassman  
University of Houston  
E-mail: HDCS6@Jetson.uh.edu

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### 19.1. Date: Wed, 24 Aug 94 09:25 PDT

From: Gen Patthey-Chavez <IEQ2GXP@MVS.OAC.UCLA.EDU>  
Subject: History & Evolution  
To: xlchc@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

In this on-going discussion about cognition, action, internalization, and moral authority, I feel very uncomfortable about the history=evolution turn taken.

How different are we from our illustrious pre-decessors?

Let's take the Greeks.

They showed up from somewhere else, liked what they saw, and stayed put.

Lots of other people showed up from somewhere else, also liked what they saw, and the Greeks, who had settled the settlement questions with THEIR predecessors by then, had to deal with that issue all over again . . . and again . . . and again . . . which brings me to my point: I don't get a picture of seamless, homogeneous, one-standard of conduct type of society from that history. Where did the Greeks get all their tragedies from? From a lack of post-modern complexity?

I would prefer to start from a premise that does not equate history with evolution, and that does not accept the myth that village life is simple and barrio life complex . . . While I whole-heartedly agree with the Mexican saying "Lugar chico, infierno grande" (Small place, big hell), and thus do feel that urbanity is different, simplicity/complexity is not the relevant dimension.

Cheers,

Genevieve

### 19.2. Date: Wed, 24 Aug 94 21:06:58 EDT

From: Martin.Packer@um.cc.umich.edu  
Subject: Internalization and history  
To: xlchc@UCSD.EDU

Genevieve, I'm not sure why you think I'm equating history with evolution. I don't think that complexity is progress, and many of the people whose writing about Greek morality I'm familiar with would say that our contemporary moral complexity marks a decline, not an evolution. Here's Agnes Heller in that vein:

"Since, in the golden age of the Athenian city-state, the \*body politic\* was the only external authority for the citizen, the internal corruption of that same city-state led to an authority crisis and a shift towards both conscience regulation and interest regulation. Different as these forms are, they have one thing in common: namely, that they assert the \*person\* as the source and fountainhead of rational decision and action." (Heller, 1985, *The power of shame*, p. 11, original emphasis.)

But after writing my last message I read two pieces that argue convincingly for the diversity of conceptions of identity over the centuries, even in the West - Charles Taylor's 'Sources of the self,' and D. W. Murray's 'What is the western conception of self?' (Ethos, 1993). I think I was too quick to write of "we" in the west. The cultivation of internal agency is only one attempt at a solution to the problem of diverse external moral authorities, a contestable attempt at that, and there are many different ways of cultivating interiority. But my amateur attempt at historical cultural comparison was somewhat tangential to my main line of speculation, which was the construction of an inner realm has a moral aspect to it that might deserve consideration.

martin

Martin Packer

University of Michigan

### **19.3. Date: Wed, 24 Aug 94 23:51:42 EDT**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>

Subject: Morally responsible identity

To: xlchc@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

Martin Packer's reply to Gen Patthey-Chavez reminded me of his basic argument about the importance of a moral dimension to our notions of internal self-hood and identity. I didn't read into it what Gen evidently did, but I would agree with both that diversity is the starting point in all communities and cultures, with respect to everything.

History may not be evolution, but then neither is evolution -- at least not in the sense of progress, which is surely in the eye of us beholders, and not without a good measure of un-de-centered hubris into the bargain! Evolution, especially seen as the successive stages in the self-organization of the biosphere-cum-plant, ala Gaia/Lovelock, does certainly seem to lead from complexity to greater complexity, at least in the sense that it takes more information, in any descriptive code, to specify all the phenomena and connectivities in the later stages. Of course

an interest in complexity as such only comes from some of us humans in a particular culture at a not accidental moment of our own history ....

And while complexity may be loosely measurable, it is not so clear whether diversity is. A city is probably more complex in the above sense than a village; whether it is also more diverse is a bit trickier. Perhaps we can say that it is just as diverse, but in more different ways? The problem is probably exactly like that of the classic fractal boundary measure problem (How long is the coastline of Britain? depends on the scale of measure). On any one scale we get some measure of diversity; but human social diversity operates across many scales, and there is no invariant procedure for deciding what those scales ought to be across communities. So it is probably best to eschew comparisons, especially quasi-quantitative ones, and look first to what sorts of complexity and what sorts of diversity matter in the community.

But back to the moral dimension of identity. It seems reasonably clear that in some of the subcultures I participate in, the notion of personal identity is conflated with that of responsible social persona (extended to legal person, economic entity, etc.) and that this is fairly basic to social control (discipline and punishment, imprisonment, etc.) and to assignments of moral responsibility (AMR). To the extent that someone enacts these AMR practices reflexively, as part of the construction of their own identity (i.e. "There is an I. I am the sort of entity that can be held / hold myself morally responsible. I am morally responsible for ..."), we find that we make ourselves be / seem to ourselves to be not just "us" but a special kind of "us", a kind that can be, and is, morally responsible for actions, thoughts, desires, fantasies, etc.

We can highlight this aspect of cultural notions of identity by considering some limit-cases.

One of my favorites: is it not unjust to imprison the other social persons of an organism inhabited by a multiple-identity personality just because one of the social personas constructable for this organism is assignable moral responsibility for a crime? This just shows the limit of the one social person = one organism dogma, and its connection to AMR practices.

Another considers the nature of what we can hold ourselves / be held morally accountable for. Classically only "voluntary actions" -- which begs a lot of questions about the construction of an acting agent, its free will under various circumstances, the role of intentionality in action, etc. But in various European cultural traditions, moral accountability gets extended also to desires and fantasies (to "sin in thought" ), and this then reaches a sort of limit case in the question of whether, under such MRA practices, we are morally responsible for what we dream?

In another dimension, we can raise various questions about the moral responsibility of entities more extensive or inclusive than the classical "individual self": in other cultures and historical epochs there were certainly notions that seem to us possibly equivalent to holding whole families and clans morally responsible for either their collective behavior or that of some integral part of them (a member; to us an individual, but perhaps not in the same sense to them). Or whole lineages, even unto the seventh (or whatever) generation; which makes perfect sense if one thinks of transgenerational lineages as the temporal trajectory units of the social universe. Or whole corporations, or institutions. Or nations. Or races. Or species. Or communities. Or gene-lines.

Or we can dissolve the uncritical unit of the individual internally: what of assigning moral responsibility to a part of the individual? My inner child did it. My evil self did it. "Jamie" did it. Or, on the organismic side: If thine HAND offend thee, cut it off; or thine EYE, pluck it out. This may not originally have been a metaphorical usage. And think, too, of Dr. Strangelove's hand, with a will of its own (to throttle the good doctor).

Spirits and ghosts, in conjunction with sorcerers or not, and even malevolent places and inauspicious times can be assigned moral responsibility in the many moral cosmologies of human cultures.

One local variant has it that each biological human organism "has" just one unitary identity or "self", singular and continuous across all the activities that involve it, and over maturational time and aging, and assigns moral responsibility for all actions for which it is said to be the "acting subject" in the local folk-theory of action only to this one "self" and the whole associated organism! How bizarre. JAY [on behalf of the fingers that typed, the neurons that fired, the bits of habitus that shaped, the cultural practices and intertexts that inform, and the histories that led up to this message].

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#### **19.4. Date: Thu, 25 Aug 94 08:50 PDT**

From: Gen Patthey-Chavez <IEQ2GXP@MVS.OAC.UCLA.EDU>

Subject: conduct & activity

To: xlchc@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

Whether the projected past be barbarous or a "golden age," the rhetoric of modern difference is the same, and it's that rhetoric I'm wary of. On the other hand, yes, the "construction of an inner realm has a moral aspect to it" worth considering.

What is/are the relationship(s) between conduct and activity systems? Between agency and action? To put it in a slightly humorous way, who stole my truck's tailgate?

Cheers,

Genevieve

### **19.5. Date: Thu, 25 Aug 1994 10:06:32 -0600**

From: dykstrad@varney.idbsu.edu (Dewey Dykstra, Jr.)  
 Subject: Re: Internalization and history  
 To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

Martin Packer in a recent note used the phrase: "marks a decline, not an evolution." This seems to imply that evolution is progress. This may have been a slip that Martin did not really intend, but it reveals an all too common everyday notion of evolution which is not supported by either observation of the natural world or the words in the past of the likes of Darwin or currently the words of Gould.

This everyday notion of the equivalence of evolution and progress has made for a lot of ineffective conclusions ranging across the spectrum of human concerns.

Dewey

++++  
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 +++++

### **19.6. Date: Thu, 25 Aug 1994 14:55:58 -0500 (CDT)**

From: HDCS6@Jetson.UH.EDU  
 Subject: Evolution, progress, and pigs  
 To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

I thought that originally evolution did have a meaning related to progress, which is why Darwin resisted using it in his early works. I wonder if we want to throw out the notion of progressive evolution all together. A good deal of evil has been done in its name, but some pretty good things have come out of it also. The work of Engels is linked to this romantic notion, as are, I believe, the works of Vygotsky and many of the activity theorists. There is nothing inherently wrong, I think, in the notion that individuals progress in how they think and this will lead to a more understanding society. Whether this equates history with evolution really depends on how you view history (and pre-history).

On the subject of pigs. I may have been raised in New York City, but I stand by my contention that a pig as a pig offers only a limited number of affordances (although a new movie, -The Advocate-, has increased the number for me).

Michael Glassman

University of Houston

### **19.7. Date: Sat, 27 Aug 1994 09:25:46 -0700 (MST)**

From: KGOODMAN@CCIT.ARIZONA.EDU  
Subject: Re: Internalization and history  
To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

I share Dewey Dykstra's concern for the assumption that the direction of evolution is always positive. I've been concerned myself with the assumption, sometimes expressed on this forum, that alphabetic writing is superior to other writing systems by virtue of it having resulted from an evolutionary process. That carries with it a number of serious threats to scholarship: 1. that existing non-alphabetic writing systems are inferior anachronisms. 2. That users of such systems are limited in what they can express and learn. 3. That there is no reason for non-alphabetic writing systems to continue to exist. 4. That we, alphabetic literates, are superior to all others (the ultimate ethnocentrism). The danger of any belief that evolution and progress are the same is heightened when it is held by those believe they stand at the pinnacle of the evolutionary chain.

Ken Goodman

### **19.8. Date: Sat, 27 Aug 94 23:55:04 EDT**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>  
Subject: Progress and alphabets  
To: xlchc@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

I am happy to agree with Ken Goodman's yardstick of skepticism regarding the progressive nature of change: if the people defining what is progress just happen to find themselves at its apex, beware!

I am currently reading and researching a bit on the history of mathematics. There is some interesting discussion about "progress" in mathematical notation and its relationship to "progress" in mathematical discovery. I am quite suspicious about the received opinion on such matters, though I am very interested in the possible relationships between modes of semiotic representation and the kinds of meanings people make with these forms. I do not believe they are independent (call me a neo-Whorfian!). Certainly they have not arisen independently in the history of human activity.



One useful corrective to progressivism is to be deliberately contrary and consider the consequences. I have often thought, and I am not alone in this, that syllabic scripts are in many ways superior to alphabetic ones. There is some evidence that they are easier to learn (e.g. Japanese *\_kana\_*, Korean), that they map onto our ways of hearing spoken language more readily than do the more analytic alphabetic scripts (really these are approximations to phonemic scripts). There is a long debate in phonology over whether syllables or phonemes are the more useful primary unit of analysis. Alphabetic scripts are harder to learn but more economical in use (fewer symbols do more work) -- provided the kinds of uses are the ones we are used to. Alphabetic scripts are also very reductionist: they "falsify" the sound patterns of spoken language in order to achieve their economy of means (making things look alike that do not in fact sound alike, either to people or to acoustic sonographs).

Naturally alphabetics adapt relatively better to some languages than others; tone-languages do seem to do better syllabically. Chinese script is morphemic in form, but syllabic in function, at least in relation to the spoken language. (Ultimately many literate cultures develop written languages that do not need to be "voiced" to be read; classical Chinese is an extreme case, but probably you know some words by meaning and grammar that you avoid trying to pronounce, even subvocally!).

If we shift to the case of mathematical notations, I think it becomes clearer that notations have value mainly in relation to their uses, i.e. to the uses of the semiotic resources which they notate. As language shifts from being a primarily spoken medium, to one which can be used without speaking, the criteria of what is a good visual notation for language change. When numbers are used to represent equivalent ratios, rather than distinct serial cardinalities (i.e. 1,2,3,4,5,...), or to do certain kinds of calculations (multiplication, division vs. simple counting), then the notation best adapted to one may not be the best for the others, etc. So also with the more complex conventions of mathematical notation (functions, derivatives, etc.).

Undoubtedly if we then examine the social context of the activities in which mathematics or writing have been used, including the issues of who was using them do what to/for whom, we might get a more ramifying rather than progressive picture, and even some sense of the role of social power relationships in the history of even such abstract matters as writing systems and mathematical notations. JAY.

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**19.9. Date: Sun, 28 Aug 1994 06:49:29 -0700**

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>  
Subject: progress in writing systems  
To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

This is a hot topic indeed. I am waiting for a copy of David Olson's *\*The World on Paper\** to arrive so we can get it reviewed in MCA. Meantime, for those interested, there was an article by Bob Glushko circa 1981 in the LCHC Newsletter on how different writing systems have advantages at different levels of expertise, for different purposes for different languages. There are also articles by Japanese colleagues, Giyoo Hatano for one, on the special advantages of Kanji in some reading contexts because of the conceptula milage to be gotten from the montage principles built into them (e.g., to know what hemophilia means an American who does not know the greek roots hasn't a clue, but a japanese who encounters a word with elements that mean blood/water (or some such, I don't recall the correct elements) can figure out what is meant more easily. This advantage has been demonstrated experimentally.

I am in the middle of Steve Gould's *\*Wonderful Life\** which is an extended argument about progressivist views of evolution and like all of his work, a great pleasure to read. I'll summarize the main argument if someone does not beat me to it.... and if I can find the right 20 minutes between other chores.

mike c

PS- Does a tractor represent progress over a digging stick and penecilin over leeching? Cupping anyone?

**19.10. Date: Sun, 28 Aug 1994 10:41:18 -0500 (CDT)**

From: HDCS6@Jetson.UH.EDU  
Subject: Alphabets, mathematics, and progress  
To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

I think it is important to separate alphebets from mathematics in terms of talking about progressive evolution. Alphabets may be poor examples because they are unique to certain cultural histories, an while their development was used to solve problems, there are a host of other issues in their development also (for instance a ruler may have forced a certain alphabet on a population because it was easier for him or her to use; something that is currently being replayed in many companies with computer languages). Mathematical notation, on the other hand, is a universal language that has been, and is being developed specifically to solve what seemed unsolvable problems (from what I can tell mathemeticians consider to problems abstract, while physicists consider them part of the material world....how's that for a generalization?). Anyway, if you have an unsolvable problem (say, like the famous egg carton problem), and you develop a notation which solves the problem, which

makes it easier to pack egg cartons, isn't that both adaptation and progress? I think I need to go out and buy that Stephen Jay Gould book.

Michael Glassman

University of Houston

### **19.11. Date: Sun, 28 Aug 94 13:29 PDT**

From: Rolfe Windward <IBALWIN@MVS.OAC.UCLA.EDU>  
Subject: Re: progress in writing systems  
To: xlchc@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

Just a couple of notes:

In "Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things," George Lakoff discusses the lack of universality (transcendental rationality) in mathematics from the perspectives of both formal mathematical theory (e.g., Godel-Cohen) and linguistics (absence of universal basic level categories). While I'm not sure I completely understand Lakoff's approach to cognitive semantics, I found his proof (p355-361) of the proposition "if mathematics is transcendentally true then it can not be unique" fascinating.

Here's a brief abstract of Stephen J. Gould's "Wonderful Life" (but more could be said!): This book describes a paleontological debate which has numerous ramifications for other sciences. The Burgess Shale deposits, located in Yoho National Park, British Columbia, contain an extraordinarily rich Cambrian fossil yield. The enormous diversity of living forms revealed in these strata, many with no apparent surviving representatives, has prompted Stephen Jay Gould to posit a key role for contingency in evolution. Arguing that the initial explosion of phyla in the Cambrian was followed by the extinction of most, many of which showed no sign of selective inferiority to those that survived, the author stands the orthodox view of ever-expanding, rationalized diversity on its head and further makes a compelling argument for the necessity of historical investigation and narrative in this, and many other domains of scientific inquiry.

I should add that the "non-directional" quality of evolution is not controversial among biologists as it regards \_specifics but that evolution is widely regarded as ever-expanding (in terms of diversity) and gradualistic in nature. There is a good article by Don Lessem (1993) in Smithsonian magazine 23(10) 107-115; "Weird Wonders Fuel a Battle Over Evolution's Path" that very accessibly discusses the issue and introduces some of the key personalities in the debate.

Rolfe Windward

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**19.12. Date: Thu, 01 Sep 94 01:16:20 EDT**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>  
Subject: Progress, nyet  
To: xlhc@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

"Progress" is not, I think, a notion we need to save. For me the discourse of progress, especially with regard to history, has several fundamentally misleading features.

First assumes a linearized view of history, as if there were only one line along which historical change can be mapped. Originally it arose in the context that it was just "our history", a retrospective creation of lineage (and justificatory mythology). How today can we imagine that there is only one history? There is no single, unitary history of the human species in cultural terms (and probably not in biological terms either). There is no "world history"; there is at best a mosaic of more and less strongly interacting communities, each with its own complex and intertwined lineages (if we buy this sort of notion of history at all). There is change along all these pathways, and no simple relations among the change patterns.

So "progress" could mean, at most, improvement along all these different lines simultaneously. I do not think it would be very easy to maintain this in accordance with any consistent criteria of progress; there would be conflicts between criteria set for different lines, or if one set of criteria were chosen (how?), there would not be such progress along all the lines (evolution depends as much on extinction as on variation or self-organization). Not all change is adaptive; many human communities have perished and continue to perish, many historical lineages are dead-ends. It even seems reasonable to suppose that every lineage is a dead-end (every species ends in extinction), which again raises deeper questions about the usefulness of constructing such lineages in the first place.

No theory of progress really assumes that later is always better; one allows for retrograde steps ("two steps forward, one step back"). The assumption is that somehow "in the long run" later is better, or in statistical evolutionary terms, the moving average improves, on the average. This is very slippery even in biology, where there is an almost circular definition of better (whatever there is eventually more of must be "better" adapted, at the time). But how can this average be taken, culturally, for all human communities? It really only makes sense in a model which assumes that one set of human cultural practices ultimately comes to dominate (numerically) or replace others. This is why it is at odds with a valorization of diversity, as well as with the fact of diversity (multiple lineages). (And why it is the historical spawn of Europe's imperialist period?)

All this is not to say there aren't some related notions we might want to preserve in some form. We probably want some notion of "historicity" itself, not as a linear succession of events or stages of cultural development, but as the fact of social and cultural change, as the thesis that past social and cultural practices have

constantly continued to remake the conditions for subsequent practices. We probably want some notion of adaptedness or effectiveness by storable criteria for some local conditions, a notion of how "good" practice X is in some time and place. (Tractors are not objectively and universally better than simpler agricultural implements; they carry a heavy price-tag, they are embedded in complex systems of social conditions, not all desirable even by our own values, they are adapted for certain kinds of agriculture in certain kinds of societies, with certain kinds of attendant costs, relative to certain values systems, etc. Like alphabets.)

I am not sure we want even a multi-linear view of history. Foucault (*Archeology of Knowledge*) already gives us a much richer notion of what a history might be, and a grid of possibilities against which to judge historiographically the particular discursive constructions of "histories".

If we do not linearize change, and we do not universalize the criteria of what is "better", then what would we need a notion of "progress" *for*?

JAY.

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### **19.13. Date: Thu, 01 Sep 1994 17:49:39 -0600 (CST)**

From: "Joseph Ransdell <bnjmr@ttacs.ttu.edu>" <BNJMR@ttacs1.ttu.edu>  
Subject: progress is real and not always good  
To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

Jay is mistaken in supposing that we can or should simply jettison the idea of progress. The mistake is in not recognizing that something can progress without the progression being toward something better. Jay's assumption is that the idea of progress has the idea of being better built into it somehow. But it doesn't.

For example, one of the key conceptions of the Al Anon program and the many addiction programs that have taken over its basic approach to addiction is that alcoholism is a progressive disease. (I am not worried about the word "disease". If someone wants to substitute "condition" or something else that makes no difference to my point.) The idea that it is progressive certainly doesn't mean that it gets better but is understood to mean rather that, given the stage of alcoholism one has advanced to at the time one had one's last binge, there is no return to any stage prior to that. The importance of that for the alcoholic is that one of the stock self-deceptions is the one that comes along after the person has been dry for a long time--maybe for many years--and then starts remembering the good old days when he or she first started drinking and thinks about how much fun it was and

about how the hangovers weren't all that bad, etc., and since one hasn't had a drink for many years one becomes convinced that one can start out as drinker all over again, and this time not let it get out of hand. The testimony is typically that it just isn't so. Try it and you find that you are at that stage in the nightmare life of the alcoholic where you were when the last binge occurred. If they pulled you out of the gutter that time, they will be pulling you out of an equivalent gutter (or worse) next time, too. You have progressed to there, and you will move on from there, regardless, if you decide to drink some more.

Cancer, too, can quite naturally be regarded as progressive and is often talked of in that way, but no one thinks of the advance of cancer as a good. So also for MS and any number of other diseases. Progressions in musical movement are like that. The last note in the progression is what is because of the cumulative effect of the notes prior to it. That is just a neutral fact; not musically good or not good. So also for numerical progression.

I don't know exactly how to analyze the conception. It involves the notion of accumulation certainly. But progress is for the good is not built into it except insofar as some goal state is contextually being assumed, and even there "good" or "better" is only being used in a relative sense.

It is true, of course, that in historical contexts some kind of absolute goodness or betterness is sometimes assumed, but the assumption is not there because of the conception of progress as such, but because of the framework conceptions being used, and to try to abandon the use of the conception, as Jay seems to favor, is only to insure that it will reappear in a disguised form since there are in fact progressive phenomena.

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#### **19.14. Date: Fri, 2 Sep 1994 09:00:38 -0700 (PDT)**

From: Mary K Bryson <brys@unixg.ubc.ca>  
Subject: Re: Post-relativism  
To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

Hey Jay-

If you r serius about that pomo stuff

what is LCHC for-- not about-- for

If Grice was spot on about conversational assumptions

then all these folks must have some intentions re. defining

I read LCHC lmost daily for a dose of propositional knowledge

facts we know about Vygotsky Marx Mead or alphabets

Almost every entry, rhetorically speaking, constructs itself as an argument for the person's own definition of say internalization practice community and the like. So some of us must still believe in truth otherwise we'd be out there working instead of in here typing.  
Mary B

**19.15. Date: Sat, 03 Sep 94 14:17:16 EDT**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>  
Subject: Progress 1: historicity  
To: xlchc@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

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Joe Ransdell says he disagrees with my posting about getting rid of the idea of progress, but his argument seems to come to much the same conclusion that I did: that we can do without the "later is better" notion, but we want to keep what I called "histori- city":

>as the thesis that past social and cultural practices have  
>constantly continued to remake the conditions for subsequent  
>practices.

which was my way of restating my usual view about the dynamics of self-organizing systems, namely that over each durational "moment" they are acting in ways which create new conditions and new dynamics in the "next" moment. This is my basic analysis of "developmental" processes in human development (as expressed here often and in my Cultural Dynamics article, which has indeed finally appeared -- citation in separate posting), and of course applies to such closely similar phenomena as the course of a disease like cancer, or the possible trajectories of alcoholic syndromes (properly analyzed, as I think Joe implies, across levels of organization, and for a system larger than the notional individual -- more obvious, say, for infectious diseases as phenomena of ecosystems as well as organisms, cells, persons, communities, etc.). Joe called his examples "progressive processes", which is actually a handy term for the

developmental- individuating dimensions of self-organization in some kinds of complex systems (see the article for what kinds).

In history, progressive processes in this narrow sense are what I meant by the valuable notion of historicity (didn't we have a pun a while back on "hysteresis", a superficially similar phenomenon? Hystericity? Hystoricity? would it also partly finesse His/Her- story?). I think this notion is actually somewhat slighted by Foucault in his more historiographical view of what historical *\_discourses\_* do (as opposed to what our discourses of material historical systems say such systems do). It is the important contribution of the paradigm of self-organization to a conception of history.

But "progress in history" (i.e. something getting better) as a central meaning of "the progress of history" (i.e. history as a progressive process in the above more limited sense) seems to me, contra Joe's more sophisticated semantics, to have mostly been dominant in our cultural tradition. I am quite happy to leave "historical progress" for "historical progression", especially if we take the latter beyond Foucault to include the sense given for the nature of "progressive processes" in complex dynamical systems. JAY.

### **19.16. Date: Sat, 03 Sep 94 14:17:52 EDT**

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>  
Subject: Progress 2: betterment  
To: xlchc@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

Progress, part 2. "Betterment"

The other notion I thought worth saving from "progress in history" was that of "better" as locally adapted (in some time and system context, and for some activity) according to some community's or subculture's value system.

When this is combined with the notion of hystorical change (where the connection between moments is mediated by the complex system dynamics of hystoricity, see Part 1), we get two different sorts of claims for "progress" as betterment:

= claims that something has gotten better somewhere for somebody as part of a larger process of hystorical dynamics/change

and

= claims that there is a general, long-term tendency or trend for lots of sorts of things to get better for lots of sorts of people, and/or for the system as a whole (if it is a whole)



The first, more modest proposal is undoubtedly true to some extent, and one can argue case by case, and across cases, how extensive this may have been and for whom, or for what, and by which/whose criteria.

The second, very optimistic proposal, depends a lot, as I argued a few posts back (and as others have elaborated) on the scale over which we choose to average. I think a lot of the optimism for this proposal comes from very selective averaging. We did get, however, some arguments that things might have gotten better for humans because humans have been working throughout history to make things better for themselves. In system terms this amounts to proposing that the dynamics of the system has been biased at each step by the actions of humans acting with respect to their values/beliefs for human-good resulting in a trajectory that shows betterment from a human viewpoint.

Many of the same arguments I made before would seem to apply to this version of "progress". (1) We cannot assume a single, coherent, system; there are multiple, mosaic systems on different scales with different (more and less) interlinking trajectories and dynamics. Not all of these are getting better all the time, and most or all seem destined for extinction. (2) We cannot assume a commensurability among the notions of human-good which prompted actions in these different subsystems at different periods of time (loci along the trajectories). Why should the work done to make things better by one set of criteria/values-beliefs lay foundations for making things better by a quite different set of criteria/values-beliefs? even along the same trajectory? There is quite a lot of selective retrospection at work in inventing any sort of coherent cumulative tradition, even for something as apparently (to us) universal as the "fight against disease" (actually a very modern, European notion).

To these general problems one can add a few other obvious difficulties:

People have not been systematically working for human-good as such, but very often for their own betterment at the expense of the condition of other humans -- and the numerical ratios would not seem to favor the hypothesis. (Our postmodern environmentalist perspective, in showing us that seeking human-good we may be harming system-good and so shooting ourselves in the back, tends to make us see more solidarity on the human side than seems to have been the case historically -- or presently.)

The very notion of working for betterment is a modernist (and in the form we are using it also, until recently, perhaps a specifically European) one. In many societies people worked mainly to maintain the natural-social order, fearing that otherwise things would get worse. Their value systems were defined by their conception of this proper order, and did not include a general disposition to change it at all, and a fortiori not even to change it for the better. Good precluded better in many such worldviews. Modern conservatives have this as their essential dilemma, all moderns believe that betterment is good, but

conservatives still retain the premodern disposition to focus more on the fear of worsening. (And we are all to that extent partly conservatives, I think.)

The escape from these values-shifts dilemmas is usually the proposal that whatever humans have done automatically and necessarily, apart from values/beliefs-driven programs and dispositions to action, (i.e. biologically and ecologically, presumably), cumulatively modifies the environment in our species' favor. This to me is the most optimistic view of all, and of course today it squarely meets itself in the environmental contradiction: if it is true, then it cannot be true (i.e. if whatever we do we favor our own species' interests, and if ecologically favoring one species' interests inevitably damages or destroys the viability of the ecosystem, then in the long run we do not, by improving things for ourselves, improve things for ourselves).

The escape from that one is to hope, even more optimistically, that human cultural value systems across a sufficiently large number of communities, fairly quickly, will change to identify human-good more closely with system-good. (Good luck!)

But this raises in turn the equally basic question of the grounds of present (or general) human identification of human-good. One could very well propose that to the extent that we see betterment over the past, it is as much because our values systems have changed to accommodate to present realities, to see what is as being better than what was, as because of any (objective?) changes in our favor. Note, by the way, that this proposal does not necessarily mean that we simply love the status quo; it can also mean that we have changed our value systems in such a way as to newly despise the past (as in many respects we have since the beginning of modernism around the Renaissance: we learned to despise feudal "stagnation", "otherworldly" religion, premodern slavery, and more recently to despise modernist imperialism, colonialism, labor exploitation, environmental exploitation, patriarchalism,...). And we regard these changes themselves as a form of progress/betterment.

If you begin to doubt, as I do, the sensibleness of trying to define an objective or universal human-good, even biologically (given the changeability of human affordances as a function of possible contexts), and rest with wrestling with the current diversity of local and positional views of human-good, then try imagining an effort to define system-good (which need not be objective, cannot be universal or timeless -- basic system dynamics changes, "evolves" unpredictably in the long term --, but does have to be at least decentered from the perspective of our species ...).

If there is hope in this view, it must lie in localism, in operating on the scale where local betterment, locally negotiated is possible. This is a matter of judgment of scale. No individual, no community, no culture can have a "God's-eye view" of history or of the planet. Perhaps it is time we stopped pretending that we can. Locally, for me, maybe that would be progress. JAY.

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JAY LEMKE.

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### **19.17. Date: Sat, 3 Sep 1994 20:52:29 +0100**

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)

Subject: More on progress and scripts

To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

This discussion on progress is a most interesting one, because it confronts god detailed material on forms or script with important ideas. Psychology in its proper place in reference to cultural history.

The term progress certainly has too meanings: to wit, simply "change" and "change to betterment". Obviously the latter is the controversial, though, probably, the true meaning for many of not most modern humans. And the problem is probably somehow related to the two notions in psycholgoy and elsewhere in the concept of development, to wit, "systematic change", i.e. neither predetermined nor random, and "change to betterment in view of some goal", i.e. teleology.

Since a few days, I am tempted to transmit passages from Johann Gottfried HERDER who, towards the end of the 18th century without much success objected to the then becoming truly virulent belief in progress and to the idea that development necessarily implied change to betterment. Herder is one of the principal founders of the modern philosophy of history. On the 25th of August we commemorated his 250th birthday. He is one of the most pertinent writers I have ever read on the human condition, especially of today, and on its scientific and artistic reflection. In fact, he has thoughts on scripts and speech giving much of the points of view and arguments presented on this platform in the last week on the basis of his comparison of Egyptian, Chinese, Hebrew, Arab, Greek etc. languages. Unfortunately, I do not now find the time, to gather the passages and translate; perhaps another time. Most of it is in his Ideas on the Philosophy of History of Mankind of 1784-91, some already in On the Origin of Language of 1772.

But here is another pertinent quote, and I think an intriguing one, from Villem FLUSSER, from one of his last papers written shortly before is sudden accidental death in 1991, entitled "From the Subject to the Project -- Human Genesis" (I translate from the German version from pp. 9f. in Vol. 3 of Schriften, published recently in 1994 by Bollman in Bensheim and Duesseldorf; I do not know whether there is an English version available already):

"In *De docta ignorantia* Nicolaus Cusanus has proposed to mathematize thinking -- preferably to think in numbers rather than in letters. With this, he laid the foundations for modernity: he no longer bows before God, but over things. Not so much so because 'God cannot better know than we that one plus one is two', rather because divine laws are encoded in words and natural laws in algorithms. To re-code thinking from letters into number is a powerful innovation. It is completely different to want to decipher divine worldly laws or natural numeric laws. Divine laws can be broken by means of sin, natural laws cannot be broken, but you can bend them by means of technology. This innovation at first appears as a change in mood: those who sin live in fear and tremble; those who take to technology put their hope in progress. But then existential problems arise: the question of why, exactly, divine laws can be broken turns into: 'If natural laws cannot be broken, why, then, can progress make us free?' The Renaissance has served up an extremely tantalizing reformulation of the question about freedom; that's what we have to rebuke of it.

"But what do we have to counter it? The suspicion, becoming more and more ensured, that the laws -- whether divine or natural -- have been put up by ourselves. That we are not the subjects of the laws, but their projects. So that we have to bow neither before God nor over things. The suspicion arrives in questions such as: how come that the laws are built according to the rules of human codes? Why does 'thou shalt not kill' follow the rules of English or of Hebrew grammar and free fall the rules of arithmetic? Don't things look as if we had ourselves codified the laws, then projected them, just to get them back through revelation and discovery. Should this suspicion become ever more enforced we really had become 'postmodern': so modernity initiated by Cusanus had passed."

Flusser goes on showing both the massive problems mankind has managed itself into in modernity as well as the exciting (in double sense, I guess) possible new forms of thought and intercourse the media (from scripts to images to simulating (what?) computers etc.) emerging from the project of modernity might subject us to new future "projections". I think we can only further illusion when trying to evaluate progress, no matter whether positive or negative, and render oneself vulnerable to the progress of those who do not care.

Alfred

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Alfred Lang lang@psy.unibe.ch  
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**19.18. Date: Sat, 3 Sep 1994 20:52:38 +0100**

From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)  
Subject: Re: Post-relativism

To: xlchc <xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu>

Mary K Bryson wrote in response to Jay's confession to relativism:

>I read LCHC lmost daily for a dose of propositional knowledge  
>facts we know about Vygotsky Marx Mead or alphabets  
>Almost every entry, rhetorically speaking, constructs itslef  
>as an argument for the person's own definition of  
>say  
>internalization  
>practice  
>community  
>and the like.  
>So some of us must still believe in truth  
>otherwise  
>we'd be out there working  
>instead of  
>in here typing.

May I ask you, Mary, why it appears preferably if not exclusively satisfying to you -- if I read you right --, to enter into dialogue with others for the sake of -- and that is for the fight for -- [one definite or final] truth rather than for the pursuit of a process that, in its nonending course, can reveal ever new facets of the condition you and your dialogue partners find yourselves?

Alfred

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Alfred Lang lang@psy.unibe.ch  
Psychology, Univ. of Bern  
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[next AL message](#)

**19.19. Date: Sat, 03 Sep 1994 18:02:22 -0600 (CST)**

From: "Joseph Ransdell <bnjmr@ttacs.ttu.edu>" <BNJMR@ttacs1.ttu.edu>  
Subject: concern for truth  
To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

In response to Mary Bryson, Alfred Lang says:

-----quote-----

May I ask you, Mary, why it appears preferably if not exclusively satisfying to you -- if I read you right --, to enter into dialogue with others for the sake of -- and that is for

the fight for -- [one definite or final] truth rather than for the pursuit of a process that, in its nonending course, can reveal ever new facets of the condition you and your dialogue partners find yourselves?

-----end quote-----

I don't think this is being responsive to Mary Bryson's point, if I understand what she is getting at, which is that there really is a difference--and not a trivial one--between just saying things because they might have this or that effect and saying something one believes to be true and supposes to be pertinent to the conversation precisely because it is true. This is a relevant point here because this is in fact a form of professional publication just as publication in a journal is--it is a making public of something--and if there wasn't a fundamental presumption that people that contribute here are trying to tell the truth and are not just making up good stories as they go along, then none of us, Jay included, would waste time on it.

It is dismaying, then, to find people overlooking the obvious, as Jay seems to be doing, and now Alfred, in stressing how trivial a value truth supposedly is--it is even dangerous, Jay darkly suggests, to have a serious concern for it. What? Are we to infer from this that the very large quantity of factual information that Jay himself purports to be conveying in his messages is just stuff that he dreams up as he goes along? Or has he actually done the *\*work\** at getting at that information--for truth about many things is not easily come by and is quite precious for that reason alone--so that we have some reason to think that in hearing what he has to say that we are getting something we can build upon? I believe of course that he has actually tried to find out the truth about those matters and is trying to relate that to us and not just impressing us with his verbal skills. But then why is he saying what he seems clearly to be contradicting in his actions? I am confident that it is not his ability as a wit and raconteur which makes his contributions here seem so valuable, though he may well have those attributes as well. But it does make it a little hard for us, doesn't it, when someone tells us all kinds of supposed facts about language and the like and then follows that up with testimony to the effect that of course he really doesn't have much respect for truth.

I hope I do not really have to say--but I will, anyway--that I have no doubt that Jay is as committed to truth as anyone I know. But of course that only makes what he says all the more puzzling.

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Joseph Ransdell - Department of Philosophy - Texas Tech University  
bnjmr@ttacs.ttu.edu (806) 742-3158 or 797-2592 Lubbock, TX 79409  
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**19.20. Date: Sun, 4 Sep 1994 14:25:25 +0200 (MET DST)**

From: raeithel@rzdspc1.informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)  
Subject: Peirce father, Peirce son, Peirce spirit (fwd)

To: xlhc@UCSD.EDU

Content-Type: text

Content-Length: 7367

Forwarded message:

From raeithel Sun Jan 9 14:13:43 1994

Subject: Peirce father, Peirce son, Peirce spirit

To: PEIRCE-L@TTUVM1.BITNET (Peirce-L)

Date: Sun, 9 Jan 1994 14:13:43 +0100 (MET)

re: Alfred Lang's Criticism of the Idea(l) of Final Interpretant

~~~~~

Alfred has uncovered for the Peirce-L audience a very interesting contrast and similarity between Peirce father and Peirce son. We are all interested in how the spirit of Charles Sanders's philosophy might be rejuvenated, and also in which tree (or jungle?) of arguments it could be spelled (spelt?) out more consistently (not excluding variety) than before our times.

That is a first and quite sober interpretant of my subject line:

>> Peirce father, Peirce son, Peirce spirit

and my intention is to stick to such a sort of sobriety throughout.

Yet, there is also the well known fact that Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel has found his universal process triad of position, negation, synthesis in reflecting on the still older christian triad of father, son, spirit: the absolute, the mortal, the community. -- It is not easy to keep sober in these matters, yet it helps to live in Hamburg, Germany; far from the States with their strange sorts of TeeVee religions...

Additionally, the self-rising voice of Ludwig Feuerbach re-minds me that GOD is a symbol which effectively organizes any living religious community by **Verhimmelung je unseres wirklichen Gemeinwesens** (putting into the heavens "our" real community as an ideal one). Ludwig, too, was an infamous son of a famous father -- which made his fame in jurisdiction and as the man who found and educated Kaspar Hauser. Quite a different family spirit than Benjamin Peirce's newtonian perspective on universe, life and soul.

Let us just gloss over the similarities of the biographies of Peirce and Feuerbach (both are stories of sons, not of daughters; of outsiders living in a country refuge of literary writing fees; of uneven and slow-rising effect in the social sciences; of other scholars taking just parts of their work while rising to fame -- William James, Karl Marx, ...), and come back to the problem of

** how to understand

** the idea(l) of Final Interpretant with both

** the origin (the idea of god's Eye or god's I) and

** the future (the ideal of a consensus in a scientific community)

** in mind.

I believe there are two main lines of interpretations of what "truth" might mean as one characteristic of the opinion arrived at by holding the final interpretant of any chain of arguments.

(1) In an effective causal interpretation we already know what a "truth" is, namely an eternal verity to be discovered by mortals, a harmony between the world of events and the subject's understanding that once was, it is said, in the possession of Father. This amounts to the belief that the symbol "true opinion of X", taken as a variable in a mathematical proof, must have a predetermined single value (a certain individual number) given to it "since time began" and to be discovered by the process that CSP spells out as semiosis in a community of researchers. Peirce's method then seems to be a natural law leading the stream of individual researches to their assured discovery of the value of the variable.

This is an effective causal explanation, because some prime mover has given the push to the scientific clockwork, and it seems quite absurd, because self-contradictory, as Alfred has shown, at least to this one reader of his answer to Robertson.

(2) What are the mechanics of arriving at truth by final causation, in contrast? The idea of the true final opinion is not treated as variable with a certain value, rather is treated as a true unknown with an indefinite range of values. Even though we cannot say anything about, and need not assume, the concrete definiteness of that opinion, we are able to use its name as an abstractly defined entity here and now, to self-control our argumentation, in exactly the same way as if we knew the result already.

Thus, this kind of knowing about the final opinion is the Setzen of Hegel, putting onto paper a symbol designating it, and working further to define a procedure of how to realize generally the details of its dynamic object in some future of ours. As I have learned in the early seventies from Michael Otte, professor of didactics of mathematics in Bielefeld, this interpretation (of what a formal variable is) was not available to the Greeks, it is a modern discovery (or construction, if you like) worked out by Vieta, and others of the 16th and 17th century.

To treat a future state as if it were possible is at the same time to change the probability that it *will* be worked out by the community willing to keep on treating it as possible. All through this process, the concrete details of the anticipation of the

final result keep on changing, yet the quest itself is still governed by the identical result symbol. And if the future state **is** really possible (which does not depend on whether it is taken to be such), there is hope that the community will indeed work it out before disintegrating.

For my mind, no cause is conceivable that does not operate during the present moment. Neither Father-God's winding of the Grand Clockwork, nor any esoteric Spirit or morphogenetic pattern out of the future space-time will do the work for me here and now. Final causes therefore must be present just like effective ones.

Now, finally, I take it to be self-evident that a hope is a present force. People are moved by self-held hopes. It is of the nature of evolution-in-general whether those anticipations will ever converge into the realization of a fully definite state of the universe and our lives down here. But if that happens, any such state of knowledge in relation to world may be named a true opinion. No other sense of "truth" is practical.

Peirce's theory of the final interpretant, taken as an ideal that one may choose to hold, thus does not assume more than necessary about truth: It **defines** truth as the consensus reached by a community for a certain period of finality. In German "the final opinion" translates into "die letzte Meinung", and surely has a connotation of finality and definiteness, but also of historicity and relativity: The final opinion of Newtonians was (!) that physics should rise to the power of Maxwell's demon.

This doesn't seem like the last word now, but once it **has** been held as the truth by a real community, and thereby it **caused** very many discoveries, for the better or worse of our post-modern times. A sign that gives me hope, personally, is that the US Government is not willing to finance the projected big accelerator of the Big Bang -- I mean of course (-) the diagnostic machine designed to test theories of the PAST big bang...

Arne.

Reference:

Michael Otte (1994): Vom Formalen, Sozialen, Subjektiven.

Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. (I have not yet seen the book).

PD Dr. Arne Raeithel

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Von-Melle-Park 5 * D-20146 Hamburg

19.21. Date: Sun, 4 Sep 1994 14:35:55 +0200 (MET DST)

From: raeithel@rzdspc1.informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)
Subject: Ideality, Truth, Final Opinion
To: xlchc@UCSD.EDU

Content-Length: 1087

As the discussion here picks up philosophical speed -- Ilyenkov is brought in, the difference between ideality as a high aim, and ideality as something semiotic (not "brutal matter") and social/societal -- there might be a chance that we could get discussion about really interesting things (for me): politics, religion, methodology-of-science, morality/ethics, professional conduct, etcetera...

Therefore I have re-sent a NewYearsNote of 1994, originally distributed to Peirce-L (Joe Ransdell is the moderator of this list dedicated to Peircean philosophy and semiotics), this time hoping of the xlchc audience that it/they/you/we will have some reactions to it (on Peirce-L there was nothing but silence to this message).

I think I know some of the reasons for the non-effect of the note when sent out nine months ago. However, it is nearly nothing, and I would like to have advice from the dominantly American audience of xlchc.

Thank you: Arne.

Newest address:

Arne Raeithel

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19.22. Date: Sun, 4 Sep 1994 17:08:35 +0100

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)
Subject: Re: concern for truth
To: xlchc <xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu>

From Joe Ransdell's reaction I see that my question to Mary Bryson could (too) easily be misunderstood. I am sorry for that possible impression. My question was not thought rhetorical or provocative in any way, but really in the sense of asking for information about the difference between an unconditional commitment to "truth" in comparison to an attitude of commitment, as unconditional than the former, to being part of a process that is governed by itself rather than by some supposed entity or agency called truth. Truth, as long as it is not specified, could not be itself part of the process but rather would govern that process from its outside. My motive

lies the observation that so many people having delivered themselves to some absolute cause or ideal that they have a name for but no factual specification make themselves insensible to other causes.

Interestingly enough, Joe, in his reaction, exclusively attends to one possible consequence of being suspicious about "truth", about any particular one and, above all, about truth in general: namely, that we might no longer rely on what people tell us when they do not accompany what they say by a (implicit) statement to the effect that this is the best what they can offer in terms of truth. Of what terms and of whose truth? Of theirs or of their fellow scientists? Or of some third party interest? I was forced years ago as a part of my doctoral promotion to take an oath to pursue truth. But nobody would be willing or able to tell me what to understand by "truth". This was reminiscent of another attempt of people to convince, on behalf of some hidden and unspecified authority, the boy I was some years earlier to not to sin because God did not like it and would eventually sanction some of my deeds. Whose God? Which deeds?

Why should it no be possible, Joe, to be, without that kind of confession, an useful, accepted and honored member of a community in which all participants have to rely on each other (like a party lost, say, in the black forests) in spite of the fact that none of them is capable of reliably stating one's present position and direction, because the various rudimentary maps and compasses available diverge? If everybody claims to have the truth, and there are different truths, there is barely a chance of getting somewhere together. Because, living in the belief that one is on track of the truth obliges one to shout and fight for that truth. This seems to be a principal condition of wars of all kinds. If, on the other side, everybody would say: look, here is my view, the best I can give now, let's compare it with yours, and then stick to the one of the two which has more for it, and then let's compare that to another one and so on, I think the members of the party would have less pains and a better chance to combine forces toward a reasonable direction of efforts would arise. I am tempted to assert that it is commitment to an empty concept of truth that has converted modern sciences largely into churches.

Maybe it's all just a matter of semantics. We could have an endless discussion on the meaning of the word "truth". For me it is, like "God" or "happiness", a relational term. And not in the sense of a primary constituent of the relation but rather in the sense that it is an emergent quality, and never fully manifest, of a relational system of which I experience myself being a part. It's not at all a pre-condition of that system. You cannot use it for your orientation, because you are yourself fully a part of it. Are concepts like these not "negative expressions" in the sense, that they designate what remains when you have ascertained what you think they are not? By adopting such an empty formula, you make yourself a slave of it. But experience demonstrates that you can well be certain to not have attained it yet, but that's all of it.

I think we have learnt exactly this from the history of religious conflicts. Now religious confessions, with few exceptions, have passed over to coexistence with those not possessing their truth. Maybe they have given up by this their very essence and sole justification of their existence. But, is an adherent of this or that confession less serious about his being a trustable member of the community when he concedes other confessions their right of being than when he claims his to be the only acceptable? I mean my question very serious: what does it mean to commit oneself, as a scientist, to truth? I've tried to describe what I mean by commitment and that label of "truth" seems not the best.

Alfred

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Psychology, Univ. of Bern

[next AL message](#)

19.23. Date: Sun, 04 Sep 1994 16:22:36 -0500 (CDT)

From: HDCS6@Jetson.UH.EDU
Subject: Progress, truth, and Frank Capra
To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

A while ago, when the discussion on progress was just getting started Mike Cole referred to an important discussion by Stephen Jay Gould in the book *-Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History-*. I have been reading the book on and off since then, and I am disappointed that we have not gotten back to it yet. So even though I feel like I'm playing with somebody else's shiny new toy before they got a chance, I think I'd like to bring it into the discussion because it raises a number of interesting possibilities in terms of what we mean by progress and truth and how we measure either or both. Before I get into it though, I am confused about the way words are being used. There seems to be a charge that individuals use the word progress to be synonymous with change. I don't think even the most intense modernist would agree with this idea. Progress does always involve change, but change does not always involve progress. By saying this is what people think you are really stacking the deck against the concept of progress. A second thing, that has already been addressed, is saying that progress is somehow means better. I was always under the assumption that progress meant moving forward. So while better is a relational term, progress is not.

Gould sees history as being contingent, and the only way to understand history as making sense is in retrospect. So history makes perfect sense looking back, but there is no way to predict it. That is because any event, even the supposedly smallest event, could have changed the course of history. He uses the example of some species found in the Burgess shale that became extinct. On the surface

there is nothing that suggested that these species should have become extinct while others survived. It was the result of historical circumstance. As Gould puts it, one slight change in organism/ ecology interaction and the monster in the Spielberg movie could have been a descendant of the Burgess Shale rather than a shark. At first blush this is very reminiscent of Michael Foucault and the archeological approach to human events. As a matter of fact I have to confess to looking to see if Gould had a reference to Foucault (which he didn't).

The more I read Gould's explanation of history however, the more I saw that he was coming from a very different perspective. Of course, an evolutionary, or Darwinian perspective. And there are two essential ideas that come out of this. The first is that history is not contingent in the random sense of the word (an idea that Gould mentions over and over again). History might go careening off if one circumstance is changed, but it is a career that is very much at effect of all that came before. In other words, E does not simply follow D...but E follows A,B,C, and D. By the time we reach D, the path that follows is not determined, but it is canalized to some degree. Thus history makes sense, it is not naturally determined, but it is not random either. Thus, when we are at point D, we know we are at point D, we know what has led to D, we know we cannot stay at D. Point E, we know, is out there waiting for us somewhere. Gould doesn't deal with consciousness so I'm going to take a flyer on his idea for a moment. We know E is coming, but there is no way we can predict what it is. However, when we get to E, as the result of contingent history, we know that we have gotten there, and we know that we have progressed. There are two ways to look at this; 1) you only know progression from a historical point, and 2) We can't predict what progress is, but we know it when we see it. And once we have reached point E we know point F is inevitable. It's helped me to think of this in Marxian terms. Marx saw society moving along different economic models, but in a historical sense he had to stop at capitalism. He knew something had to come after. Perhaps communism is only a guess. A logical point E. But some other system that he may not have even thought of may come about as the result of contingent history. We'll know when we get there.

There is a second, even more important idea from Gould, and this has to do with the notion of time frames. It took me a while to figure this out, and I may not have this right (I'd appreciate help from anybody who has read the book), but here goes. Contingent history exists on a number of levels, in cocentric circles. Therefore the concept of progress exists in contingent circles. You can start at the center with your life, then move to community, society, species, geological (I'm just making these up as I go along. You can use whatever categories you like). My life is based on contingent history. I do know I have to move from where I am...but that move may be the result of me missing a bus next month. I do know that I will know when I have progressed. However, there are two important issues. The progression will be for me, not for any of the outer circles of my life. And my life will have been, and is to a certain degree, canalized by both my prior history and where my life sits in relation to those cocentric circles. If you move to the next level, my community, and you talk about progress, the same relationships are involved with the outer circles.

So what it progress for my community may not be progress for my society. (Taking another, biased flyer, on this particular idea; when you move progress from one circle to another and try and justify it you wind up with post-modernism). I believe that the same thing is true for truth. There is personal truth, community truth, social truth, and even a species truth. We get into real trouble when we conflate the different types of truth.

So there is progress...we just have to decide what type of progress we are interested in understanding. As members of a community or society we may not be able to predict progress, but we certainly can look back and say that there has been progress. And we will all be able to agree when we have progressed. Stephen Jay Gould took his title from the movie -It's a Wonderful Life- by Frank Capra. He says it is because of its brilliant depiction of contingent history. But Capra's movies, while based on contingent history, have another quality. And that is we root for the right histories to occur so there can be progress. We root for George Bailey to want to live, we root for Mr. Smith to continue his fillibuster and humiliate the corrupt senator. We root for John Doe to fight back against the political machine. Because we know if the right things happen there will be progress....there will be a move forward, as an individual, as a community, as a society. Gould's own predilections come out in the book as, while telling the history, he openly roots for Whittington to find the new species in the Burgess Shale, because for Stephen Jay Gould's community, this is real progress. Think about it. On this network don't we all, even the post-modernists, root for somebody to have that one break through idea so there can be progress? Whittington found the truth about the Burgess Shale. As a couple of member of the network have pointed out that's the reason we all read and contribute to our field. All of us...deep down in our hearts.

Michael Glassman

University of Houston

19.24. Date: Sun, 04 Sep 94 22:11:05 EDT

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>
Subject: Final truth
To: xlchc@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

Arne Raeithel's cross-posting on final interpretants (which I read as Peirce semioticizing Aristotelian final causes) is fascinating. I find it particularly relevant to our continuing concerns in xlchc with the role of symbols as tools in activity.

>we are able to use its name as an abstractly defined entity here
>and now, to self-control our argumentation, in exactly the same
>way as if we knew the result already.

Quite coincidentally I have just been reading about the very shift in mathematical modes of activity attributed to Viete (Francois, fl. 1591), who introduced key elements of modern mathematical notation including the use of literal coefficients, relatively abstract variables (but not yet quite our notion of dimensionless pure numbers), etc. in his algebra. Our notion of x as "the unknown quantity", which may not even exist, nor be well-defined, nor determinable from the equations given, fits very well with Arne's interpretation that merely writing equations "for" this x (their guiding "telos") expands our capacity for argumentation regarding that which has not yet (and never may) be considered true (the hypothetical). Such a notion of an "x", or of many concepts and propositions in our discourses (which function like the equations do for x), sees them indeed as symbolic tools. They are defined by their roles in our activities (writing and solving equations, writing and analyzing discourses, making and testing hypotheses), and their use is that such activities could not occur without their participation. For the nature of the activity is different, the range and domain of possible other participants (data values, mathematical operations, verbal expressions, experimental operations) is different, and in the cases considered here *_larger_* (more inclusive, a superset) than for the more limited kind of activities which are their precursors (e.g. equations for the length of the side of a triangle when we have that triangle before us, are using calculation as a shortcut for direct measurement, quite unhypothetically).

Arne's argument is mainly about the implications for a theory of truth of this finalist vs. the classical causal-effectivist view of argumentation and propositions. It is a nice recapturing of the premodern to show that the postmodern critique of modernist certainties is not so bizarre as the modernists wish it were. In the Peircean formulation, it is a good and necessary thing about truths that they remain subject to further "interpretation", and that they are more like "x" than like eternal verities, fixed *_ab initio_* (or *_in praesente_*). They lead us ever on ... they enable us always to do the *_next_* meaning-making ... they open our windows, rather than closing the door with the finality of modernist truth. Finalist truth does not finalize, does not seek or expect a final answer, it is open-ended.

This radically anti-modern stance should not be confused with the modernist notion of fallibility: that we may have got it wrong this time, but that of course it is possible to get it right once and for all -- even if we never know that we have. A post-modernist might want to argue today that it simply is not possible to get it right once and for all, but this is not Arne's point, I think, nor what is really important. It is the change of perspective, of intellectual paradigm, away from the once-and-for-all and toward the historically evolving material and discursive activities within which any of these matters matter. JAY.

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19.25. Date: Sun, 04 Sep 94 22:11:55 EDT

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>
Subject: Post-Darwinian progress
To: xlchc@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

Michael Glassman has constructed what seems to me a fairly accurate account of the dominant Darwinist view of evolution, a pure retrospectivism, a blind "changing" that can only be construed as progress from some future point looking backwards.

This is, after all, what evolutionary biologists mainly do, and Gould's version of it is ultra-modernist, cleanly stripped of the teleologies of earlier decades. There is even a little post-modernist humility in this view, implicitly acknowledging that the criteria of what constitutes progress are those of the present species (and a small subcultural fraction of it at that).

But this ultra-Darwinism is currently being challenged very strongly within biology itself, primarily by those who are adapting the new self-organization paradigm from the physical sciences. What Gould says may be reasonable as far as it goes, but it misses something very important: that evolution accumulates the record of changes of self-organizing systems across scales from the macromolecular to the Gaian. If we look at evolution at any particular level of analysis, say species, we are partly seeing the effects of self-organization processes (like individual ontogeny or ecosystem succession) at levels above and below it. Evolution is like the net outcome of these other processes operating across different scales; there is a sort of motor for evolution, and insofar as self-organizing systems of various kinds share certain general "developmental trends" (e.g. toward greater complexity, or reduced entropy production per unit mass, etc.), evolution is not random, not purely retrospective.

This is not to say that evolution is predictable, only that it is not the result of entirely accidental processes. There is a "progressive" (ala Ransdell, i.e. without betterment implied) motor for evolution, however chaotic the path and uncertain the outcome. We do not as yet know the full implications of this revisionist picture for our views of evolution (see e.g. Kauffman's *The Origins of Order* or Salthe's *Development and Evolution*). Gould is a conservative in the current debate.

The notion of "time frames" or time-scales (Salthe calls them "cogent moments") that Glassman takes from Gould's book is of course a very important part of the new analyses (Salthe's earlier book is called *Evolution of Hierarchical Systems*, i.e. of those organized on multiple space and time scales). But the ultra-Darwinian view simply sees each higher level as accumulating the results of random changes at the lower levels. The newer view (in addition to seeing some

nonrandom changes) recognizes that the larger supersystems constrain and regulate, set the conditions for, possible viable changes at the smaller, subsystem levels. This can lead to very different conclusions.

I do partly agree with Glassman's intuition that how we regard the relations among systems on different scales has something to do with modernist vs. postmodern perspectives. The modernist view is largely reductionist, taking "individuals" (preferably human, but cloned as individual everything, from electrons to ecosystems) as primary units and seeing all else as composed from and reducible to these units. This means that truths about individuals (i.e. about classes of individuals) are the real truths and the rest is ultimately epiphenomenal. (Socioculturalists should not be too smug about this; our standard notions of "a culture" "a community" "a society" are suspiciously like clones of the traditional notion of "a human individual" and are probably seriously flawed on this account.) Postmodernism has a somewhat more democratic, or anarchic, view: each level can be made sense of from the perspective of each of the others, each is incommensurable with the others, emergently unique, and it is potentially as useful to analyze a personality as composed of communities as the other way around.

Moreover, postmodernism has a critical take on the other hierarchy implied by the modernist analysis, not the scale hierarchy, but the specification hierarchy, which classifies types of systems as being more or less general (more or fewer criterial properties, but those with more just add to the same ones found in those with less; a collection of nested sets, like Chinese boxes or Russian dolls ala Venn). What's in the middle, dead-center? Us! or more specifically the canonical viewpoint of that tiny fraction who have made the discourses of modernism as they are. Which is not to say one should throw all this away; we need some tools. It is to say that one needs ways of seeing the limitations of these tools, limitations that do not appear on their labels, because they are the limitations of their makers.

What postmodernism does with the level-specific truths of modernism is not just to re-frame them from the perspective of a different level (though that is often useful), but to attempt to determine the viewpoint from which the whole system of levels has been constructed, and to understand the sense in which those truths are even more fundamentally system-specific. JAY.

PS. "Breakthroughs" are great, they are the "catastrophes" (ala Thom) of self-reorganization of the activities and systems in which we participate. And they happen in particular (perhaps multiple) instances first. They are "progressive processes" (no betterment implied, though perhaps increase in complexity), and they do make progress/betterment possible, since they represent the most significant kind of novelty or change. But one man's betterment is another woman's despair. Are Postmodernism's breakthroughs progress? Who will say? Whose say will count? Some have always usurped a privileged right to say to Others what is better, what is true, or how to tell. That is what is morally wrong, from my point of view here and now, with notions of good or truth that are not strictly local

and perspectival: they help make symbolic violence possible. I believe that that is their _primary_ sociocultural function.

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19.26. Date: Mon, 5 Sep 1994 10:55:15 +0100

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)

Subject: Progress etc. -- Herder

To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

Thanks to Martin (and Mike) for pointing out and giving an idea of Stephen Jay Gould's book *-Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History-*. I certainly want to read it. On the other hand, I wonder how easily we let us fascinate by evolutive phenomena in far away settings that must have a limited model value compared to the developments that concern us all more directly, the cultural "progress". And when Martin reviews Gould's first principle of evolution thus:

>The first is that history is not contingent in the
>random sense of the word (an idea that Gould mentions over and over again).
>History might go careening off if one circumstance is changed, but it is
>a careen that is very much at effect of all that came before. In other
>words, E does not simply follow D...but E follows A,B,C, and D. By the time
>we reach D, the path that follows is not determined, but it is canalized
>to some degree. Thus history makes sense, it is not naturally determined,
>but it is not random either. Thus, when we are at point D, we know we
>are at point D, we know what has led to D, we know we cannot stay at D.
>Point

I am reminded of discussions on the becoming of our world in the latter half of the 18th century and especially of my rising star and one of the principal founders of historical thinking who synthesized that admirably: Johann Gottfried HERDER. Some of these universal savants had an understanding of the general idea of sytems in evolution that have been nearly forgotten in the 200 years since and that constrast sharply with the still prevalent model of betterment-progress of modernity. I have not the time now to elaborate, but perhaps I may take occasion to reproduce passages here of messages that have been presented to the Kant-Discussion list recently in response to a colleague who had mentioned Herder et

al. in passing with the usual characterisation of their anti-enlightenment, anti-rationalist stance. I have replied:

I am highly interested in Herder (who is, in my view, the most advanced evolutionary system theorist I have ever found) and his fellows including Hamann, Maimon, etc. and, of course, Kant, who helped initiate open thought, particularly with Herder, and then withdraw [into his critic, anti-evolutionary system]. By the way, I would not describe them as antirationalists. Herder, in particular is an extremely sharp and considerate thinker; what he fights against, however, is the tendency of some major enlightenment figures and their followers up to our days to value rationality all and above everything else.

If there is interest, I would be willing to help launch one of those slow reading groups centered on Herder and related texts. So I send copy of this to Lance Fletcher. Although I do not know at this time what texts are available in English and how adequate the translations are, I think a way could be found to read original and translated text in coordination. [Such a group does not yet exist, announcements of interest are welcome.]

The colleague, Steven Hoath replied:

>I am interested in your characterization of Herder as an "advanced evolutionary
>system theorist". By this do you mean *biological* evolution? I am very
>familiar with the Kantian system as expounded in the Critique of Pure Reason,
>but I know next to nothing about Herder. The basis of my interest is that I
>have always read Kant with the strong feeling that his elaboration of Time
>could be interpreted within an evolutionary context.

>

>When was Herder active and what was his relationship to Kant? This may be of
>general interest to the Kant discussion group.

Dear Steven and whoever is interested:

Herder lived from 1744 to 1803, he studied with Kant in Koenigsberg at age 18 to 20, admired him very much personally and as a philosopher and succeeded to gain inner distance of his power in the period when Kant's 'critical' system was in early gestation. He wrote a magnificent 12 pages "Versuch ueber das Sein", probably written for Kant in 1764, shortly before he left Koenigsberg, but never given to him. The paper is fully non-Cartesian, fully realist, fully dynamic, and definitely against dividing humans into lower emotions and higher reason. For Herder it was very clear early, on that, the problem of knowledge should not be separated from the problems of value/feeling and of action/will and that the solution of the epistemological dilemma must lie, to say it in modern terms, in an understanding of evolving human-environment-systems, i.e. the cultural systems as a whole

rather than in a timeless subject-object-opposition. So his thinking is relational in nature rather than of the substance and predicate kind. This probably has made him difficult to read, since he could not yet employ the mathematical tools of the later 19th and our century.

So this is truly a completely different world view and image of man compared to Kant's and in many respect an anticipation of what modern non-Cartesians try to re-invent. Many of the arguments spelled out a century later by Charles Peirce, both against Kant and in favor of evolutionary realism, have been clearly formulated by Herder. Later in life the determined disciple and his fatherly teacher were both rather critical and then unfriendly to each other; and even before their last year the philosophical community in its cruel majority would unjustly put all the blame on Herder, and the history of ideas and scientific thought grew into idealism and positivism etc.

Herder, having opportunity as one of the very few to study Kant's 1755 natural history book, was probably somehow inspired by Kant's "theory of the heaven", the speculative generalization of the Newtonian systems of the planet's motion to stars in general. Synthesizing ideas of Spinoza and Leibniz, Herder transferred the idea of dynamically balanced opposing forces to world systems in general and developed a theory of systematic change in complex systems based on small local shifts. An ardent anti-nominalist, he refuted the assumption of any specific telos in the world's evolution in favor of regulatives and constitutives emerging on the past history of any system complex enough to exclude in any next step anything that is not strongly related to its previous character. This all while fostering a broad and open idea of *humanitas* as a guideline for evaluation and action. In particular he developed a most fascinating view of the emergence of what is specifically human out of the systemic interplay of animal characters without postulating anything fundamentally unique to humans of a separate nature, be it a rational or divine faculty, and avoiding as well materialist illusions.

Evidently, he could not have a clear idea of bio-evolution, given the then state of biological knowledge, nor of the functional anatomy of the brain and its phylogenesis. In fact, he developed his ideas mostly in respect to cultural evolution, perusing his very comprehensive contemporary knowledge on the history of the formation of cultural traditions around the world and of their diversification. Individual conduct and development also is important in his views, in that individual action and personal and communal evaluation play a crucial role in the evolution of communities of all sizes from friendship and family to institutions and nations, i.e. of culture systems. In contrast to Vico, his conception of history emphasizes the generative role of dialoguing individual agents; he knew very well about the interplay between the general and the singular. He was probably the most influential thinker towards the foundation of the historical sciences and he is certainly the earliest comprehensive thinker of linguistic relativity.

Herder is a thinker of a scope and depth yet to discover in a larger community. Most of the ideas I have presented in the above sketch are not satisfactorily represented in the literature about him so far. Like so many innovative thinkers he did not succeed writing that neat comprehensive book. In integrating ideas both of the enlightenment and its critics, he stands for another, perhaps more humane, face of "enlightenment". I sometimes wonder about what course our societies had taken in the the two centuries since, if the Herderian way of understanding the world had been preferred over the miracles and dead ends of absolute reason mightily inspired by the Kantian framework.

To answer your specific questions, Steven, I use the terms "evolution" or "evolutive" as collectives for all kinds of systematic change, i.e. change that is neither fully determined nor simply by chance, particularly in biotic, organismic, social and cultural systems and perhaps also in cosmic systems, the specifics of any of those types of evolution, of course, have to be dealt with by comparison. As to your "strong feeling that Kant's elaboration of Time could be interpreted within an evolutionary context", I am not in a position to give dependable answer. In general, the most obvious and consequential difference between Kant's and Herder's conception of man and of the world can be described in static vs. dynamic terms. Kant's world appears to have one crucial and final Archimedian center fixed forever, so to say; Herder's has none such, or a multitude and variety coming and going, and his interest is to observe how they interact and evolve over time. But I would welcome learning more about evolutive ideas in Kant.

By the way, for those in need of a more concrete picture, Goethe's Faust is evidently a partial portrait of his longtime friend Herder, although you cannot transfer everything from drama to life. Hope my short and inadequate notes give you an idea.

Post-modernism seems to have its history. Alfred

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19.27. Date: Mon, 5 Sep 1994 11:21:26 +0100

From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)
Subject: Re: Progress etc.
To: xlchc <xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu>

Here are just two Herder quotes, my translation and original, from book 15 of his "Ideas on the philosophy of the history of mankind", part III of 1787, that may give you some feeling for the Herderian way of thinking humans in culture evolving, even if they need, naturally, more context and comments.

Alfred

"There is a chain [or web] of culture running in quite digressing and oddly going lines through all the established peoples we have considered so far and shall further consider. In each of which it designates waxing and waning variables and it shows Maxima of various kinds. Many of those exclude each other or constrain each other, so that, although in the long run some balance will attain on the whole, it would be a most illusionary conclusion to infer from some one perfect state in some nation to any other perfection of theirs. For example, Athens, while having the most perfect orators would therefor not have the best form of government, and, while the Chinese are so perfect in moral matters therefor have no model state for all states."

"Everywhere humankind is that what they could make of themselves, what they had the pleasure and the power to become. When they were happy in their state or when the means for improvement were not yet mature in the great seed of the times: they remained for centuries what they were and became nothing else. When they made use, however, of the weapons given to them for use by God, of their understanding, of their power and of all the occasions delivered to them with happy currents, then they artfully rose higher and formed themselves bravely. If they did not, this indolence already shows that they did not so much suffer from misery; for any strong sense of injustice, if consorted with understanding and power, is bound to become a rescuing force."

"Es ziehet sich demnach eine Kette der Kultur in sehr abspringenden krummen Linien durch alle gebildete Nationen, die wir bisher betrachtet haben und weiterhin betrachten werden. In jeder derselben bezeichnet sie zu- und abnehmende Grössen und hat Maxima allerlei Art. Manche von diesen schliessen einander aus oder schränken einander ein, bis zuletzt dennoch ein Ebenmass im Ganzen stattfindet, so das es der trüglichsste Schluss wäre, wenn man von Einer Vollkommenheit einer Nation auf jede andre schliessen wollte. Weil Athen z.B. schöne Redner hatte, durfte es deshalb nicht auch die beste Regierungsform haben und weil Sina so vortrefflich moralisiert, ist sein Staat noch kein Muster der Staaten." (Ideen, 15.iii)

"Allenthalben ist die Menschheit das, was sie aus sich machen konnte, was sie zu werden Lust und Kraft hatte. War sie mit ihrem Zustande zufrieden oder waren in der grossen Saat der Zeiten die Mittel zu ihrer Verbesserung noch nicht gereift: so blieb sie Jahrhunderte hin was sie war und ward nichts anders. Gebrauchte sie sich aber der Waffen, die ihr Gott zum Gebrauch gegeben hatte, ihres Verstandes, ihrer Macht und aller der Gelegenheiten, die ihr ein günstiger Wind zuführte, so stieg sie künstlich höher, so bildete sie sich tapfer aus. Tat sie es nicht, so zeigt schon diese Trägheit, dass sie ihr Unglück minder fühlte: denn jedes lebhaftes Gefühl des Unrechts mit Verstande und Macht begleitet, muss eine rettende Macht werden." (Ideen, 15.i)

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19.28. Date: Mon, 05 Sep 94 18:34:30 EDT

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>
Subject: Re: Progress etc. -- Herder
To: xlchc@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

I am familiar with Herder only in the most general way, and I would be quite interested to follow further discussions or hear about a reading group on Herder texts that deal with the dynamics of complex systems and cultural change/evolution.

I particularly like, in the quotations Alfred generously supplied, Herder's sense that different components of a culture may pull and tug against one another, and that there is no reason we should suppose that enlightenment in one field implies it in all. I wonder how Herder applied this view to his own German Enlightenment kultur? Perhaps the majority tendency to judge cultures as (spurious) wholes arises in part from our desire to see our own ideals as the best in all domains (or at least from the tendency for such views to get published and cited!).

I am also very curious about how he may have conceptualized the uniqueness of humans arising from special combinations of factors already present in other species rather than from wholly original traits. This view fits rather well with the emergentist paradigm of the newer evolutionary models, where recombination rather than mutation is seen as the engine of evolution in biology. JAY.

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19.29. Date: Tue, 6 Sep 1994 16:52:45 +0100

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)
Subject: Re: Progress etc. -- Herder
To: xlchc <xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu>

Hi Jay,

thanks for the interest. Both your questions are very pertinent and deserve attention.

>I wonder how Herder applied this view to his own German Enlightenment culture? Perhaps the majority tendency to judge cultures as (spurious) wholes arises in part from our desire to see our own ideals as the best in all domains (or at least from the tendency for such views to get published and cited!).

>

>I am also very curious about how he may have conceptualized the uniqueness of humans arising from special combinations of factors already present in other species rather than from wholly original traits.

I am not able now really to respond because I shall be away for four to five weeks with a short and busy break in the middle only, first on travel in the US. Here just a few thoughts. But I keep them in mind.

Your first question is indeed important but needs to take into account to what degree Herder has been time and again misrepresented as a principal originator of German nationalism. He was very selectively critical to all kinds of manifestations of national identity. His notion of nation pertains to a cultural community; since common language is one or perhaps the most important manifestation of culture, it is natural to speak of the German nation. There is full consensus among Herder scholars today that Herder's concept of nation is fully disparate with any 19th or 20th century nationalistic ideology, Isaiah Berlin's uninformed statements still in 1991 notwithstanding. Nothing could more insidious. For nothing could H. bring into stronger rage and resistance than imperialistic state and government. Herder is very Deweyan in his promotion of direct democracy among those living together.

The second is in my opinion a question system human scientists of all kinds should work upon. Herder's solution is most elegant, I think. However there is no single simple statement of it. For those reading German, I can add here a passage, also sent already to the Kant-List, that sketches his idea of Besonnenheit or Reflection (his key idea the understand the transition from animal to human) in its nascent state.

Below are sections of a paper of 1764 which was written for Herder's teacher Kant, when he was about 20 years old and left for his first full-time job as a teacher and pastor. It was probably never given to Kant. It marks both, the beginning of Kant's "critical" path and the beginning of Herder's embedding all phenomena in an integral understanding of developing humans, both as psychological and social system within their cultural world.

I have also a selection of passages and comments on the problem of Besonnenheit, this most humanly character in his view, from one of his very last

books, the Metakritik. It is his answer to Kant's schematism theory. Anybody interested can have it for the asking. I forward it to Jay on side-channel.

Best regards and a good time, Alfred

The text below was first published in 1936; it is available both in the collected works edited in the Hanser Verlag (1884, Vol. 2:573ff.) and in the Deutsche Klassiker Verlag (1985, Vol. 1:9ff.); but it is not in the Suphan edition of 1877-1913; although already known, it was found hard to decipher and also uninteresting.)

Versuch ueber das Sein

[From the dedication to, obviously, Kant:]

Ich uebergebe Ihnen hier einige Gedanken, ein metaphysisches Exerzitium, von denen die Praemissen in Ihren Worten liegen. Habe ich falsch gedacht: wohlan! ich schreibe nicht fuer die Welt, weder fuer die grosse, noch akademische Umwelt, ich schreibe nicht zu lehren, sondern zu lernen, noch fuer das schwarze Brett um den Buchstaben M [conjecturally referring to the title of Magister, that is announced at the black board]: Ihre [Kant's] Stimme wird gewisser und wahrer sein, als die Stimme des Publikums, des unbekanntenen Abgotts, den jeder nennt, das stets leere Schaele antwortet und nicht hoeret.

[...]

Prolegomena

[This section consists of 4 paragraphs, marked here by double empty lines. For easier reading, I break them in shorter pieces and add some comments.]

Es ist eine bekannte Wahrheit, die [...], seitdem sie dann Locke erhob, ueberall nachgebetet wurde: dass alle unsere Begriffe sinnlich waeren, dass es keine angeborenen Wahrheiten gebe. Man wiederholte ueberall die leere Tafel, der unsere Seele bei der Geburt gliche und die Philosophen winkten sich untereinander Ehrengruesse zu, dass ihre vor dem Poebel mit so huedsch bunten Charakteren bemalt waere.

Es ist vielleicht eine andere Frage, ob unsere Begriffe nicht anders als _sinnlich sein koennen_, obs zu unserem Selbst, [zu unserem] inneren Sinn keinen andern Weg, als durch die Schlupfwinkel der aeusseren Sinne gebe. So lange man bloss aus Erfahrungssaetzen, deren Praemissen stets der Idealist leugnet, beweisen will, so demonstriert man immer hypothetisch sicher, aber ohne den geringsten Einfluss auf ihn. Eine Frage, die mit mir die ganze ehrwuerdige Gesellschaft der

Idealisten tut. [So far, this paraphrases loosely from Kant's, 1762, Die falsche Spitzfindigkeit ...]

Um sie zu beantworten, wird man erst untersuchen muessen: ob das Bewusstsein von gemeinen Vorstellungen moege wesentlich unterschieden werden. Ich glaube, wir wuerden a priori dieses schwer beantworten koennen, wenn nicht Erfahrungsbegriffe... uns antworteten. - [But now, Herder introduces what he later will call Reflexion or Besonnenheit, i.e. not a fully new kind of mental faculty, but rather the resultants of relational processes among the various senses, the inner sense, or *_sensus communis_*, that brings a much smoother passage from animal to man than Kant's fundamentally different faculty of reason. The idea has been borrowed from C.A. Crusius, 1745, Vernunft-Wahrheiten.]

Nun aber macht dies den charakteristischen Vorzug unseres Denkens vor den Tieren aus. - Tiere denken also, Menschen sind sich auch des Denkens bewusst! Gut. So kann der aeussere [Sinn] ohne innern statt finden: Tiere sehen im Sinne Bilder, Menschen *_ihre_* Bilder, Philosophen in den Augen ihre Bilder, Portrait ihrer selbst. [Crusius had proposed to sharpen Descartes' assertion to: I am aware that I think, so I am. Herder gives that a new meaning.]

Ich bin mir meiner bewusst, ich habe den inneren Sinn; habe ich deswegen auch aeussere Eindruecke? Ein jeder, der nach dem inneren Sinn schliesst, wird sogleich dies bejahen, und erlaert man ueberdem den inneren Sinn durch das Vermoegen sich der aeusseren Vorstellungen bewusst zu sein, so ist die Sache so weise und leicht abgetan, als in den gelehrtesten Philosophischen Beweisen, da man das zu Beweisende in die Erklaerung bringt. [So Herder tries to look somewhat polite, but he sharply refuses Kant's idealistic presupposition on a psychological level rather than on Kant's original own ground, e.g. in his 1763 Beweisgrund vom Dasein Gottes, by declaring it a *petitio principii*.]

Allein versteht man nun darunter ueberhaupt das Vermoegen der deutlichen Vorstellungen, ohne [...] auf die *_menschlichen_* Wege der Aufmerksamkeit, Abstraktion und Reflexion zu sehen: so wird alsdann nichts unmittelbar daraus folgen, als dass ohne Sinne keine Ideen von aeusserlichen Dingen in unser Ich kommen koennen, dass man also kein Teil des Universums sein kann. [Already at age 20 H. admits this fundamental relatedness both of things within humans and between them and the rest of the world.]

Allein dies gibt der Egoist [= Idealist] zu, und glaubt doch Vorstellungen des Ichs, und um ihn zu widerlegen, wird man die Unmoeglichkeit zeigen muessen, dass alle unsere Begriffe nach einem goettlichen Gesetz, sich nicht aus dem inneren prinzipium des Geistes entwickeln lassen. [This alternative, of either a godly or a humanly origin of concepts, has been dealt with in the quotes from Grundsaeetze der Philosophie, 1769, passages from which have been given in my post of August 20 to the Kant-List.]

[I omit the second paragraph, in which H. admit that the idealist's position of assuming a godly faculty cannot be disproved; however, that it would be contrary to God's idea to let those curious human children learn to know themselves.] [I have a translation and comment available for the asking.]

Zurueck also zu mir - und wie betruemt; alle meine Vorstellungen sind sinnlich - sind dunkel - sinnlich und dunkel schon laengst als gleichbedeutende Ausdruecke bewiesen - Der elende Trost zur Deutlichkeit - die Abstraktion, die Zergliederung, aber wie weit erstreckt sich der! - die Zergliederung geht nicht ins unendliche fort, denn einige Begriffe sind --- sinnlich. Ich ziehe sie ab, einige sind wiederum sinnlich, bis dieses sich nicht mehr (abziehen [abstract]) laesst, der grobe Klumpen bleibt ueber [= uebrig, i.e. remains.]

Sinnlich und unzergliederbar sind also Synonima. Je sinnlicher also ein Begriff, desto unzergliederbarer - und gibt es einen, der am meisten sinnlich ist, so wird man nichts in ihm zergliedern koennen. - [Peirceans will read this as another and quite convincing approach to the idea of Firstness; the interesting thing is that H. tries it by inference, while Peirce usually points to Firstness, at least in the aspect of experience, by evocation and example.]

So wird er auch voellig ungewiss sein - ja wenn wir ganz Philosophen ohne Menschen wdren: - aber sind nicht die sinnlichen Begriffe gewiss! Haben sie eben nicht die Ueberzeugungskraft, so wie die zergliederten gewiss sind; werden sie eine Beweiskraft haben. [This again is very Peircean when you correspond Ueberzeugungskraft to intact, unquestioned belief, and Beweiskraft to scientifically minded investigation approximating truth to some extent.]

Nehmt hier die beiden aeussersten Gedanken unseres Zwittermenschen so wird jener am wenigsten |berzeugen, dieser gar nicht beweisen, jener wird von uebertriebenen Philosophen, dieser vom Poebel in Zweifel gezogen. Bei jedem ist die entgegengesetzte Gewissheit voellig unnoetig und unmoeglich und doch [stehen] beide auf der hoechsten Stufe der Gewissheit aber jener der subjektiven, dieser der objektiven. [Whichis, to me, a very realistic insight in view of the ongoing controversy between the scientifically and the religiously minded, notwithstanding that this can easily happen within one single person.]

Wuerde man also den allersinnlichsten Begriff ausforschen, so wuerde er voellig vor uns unzergliederbar - sinnlich hoechst gewiss und fast ein theoretischer Instinkt [!! did not Perice re-invent that noteworthy formula somewhere?, in any case something very similar!], die Grundlage aller andern Erfahrungsbegriffe und voellig indemonstrabel sein;

unter ihn wuerden sich die andern unzergliederbaren Begriffe sammeln lassen, und es wuerde in ihrem verworrenen Chaos, wo nicht objektiv, so doch subjektiv in Beziehung auf uns eine Ordnung gefunden -

man saehe insonderheit den Grund der Unzergliederbarkeit, der nie in den Sachen, sondern in uns liegt, und schriebe das nicht andern Wesen zu, was bloss von uns gelten kann. [How Kantian that is in the sense of the impossibility to evade the relational character of humans in the world; and how un-Kantian in the sense any apriori supposition?]

Gibts einen allersinnlichsten Begriff? - Dies fordert die Einheit, da bei jedem aliquoties ein quid zum Grund liegen muss; und welches ist diese Eins? Das, was auch dem Etwas zugrunde liegen muss: der Begriff des Seins. Wer kann sich einen sinnlichen Begriff denken, ein einfaches Wort ausfinden, einen Begriff erdenken, dem er nicht zu Grunde lge; hier reisse ich den Faden ab, den ich am Ende anknuepfen werde.

Alfred Lang lang@psy.unibe.ch
Psychology, Univ. of Bern

[next AL message](#)

19.30. Date: Tue, 6 Sep 1994 16:22:02 -0700 (PDT)

From: Mary K Bryson <brys@unixg.ubc.ca>
Subject: Re: Post-relativism
To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

----- Forwarded message -----

Date: Tue, 6 Sep 94 16:20:26 PDT
From: Mail Delivery Subsystem <MAILER-DAEMON@unixg.ubc.ca>
To: brys@unixg.ubc.ca
Subject: Returned mail: Host unknown

----- Transcript of session follows -----

550 xlchc@ucsd.weber.ca... Host unknown

----- Unsent message follows -----

Received: by unixg.ubc.ca (4.1/1.14)

id AA14484; Tue, 6 Sep 94 16:20:26 PDT

Date: Tue, 6 Sep 1994 16:20:26 -0700 (PDT)
From: Mary K Bryson <brys@unixg.ubc.ca>
To: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>
Cc: xlchc@ucsd.weber.ca
In-Reply-To: <9409031800.AA27047@unixg.ubc.ca>
Message-Id: <Pine.3.89.9409061658.A12289-0100000@unixg.ubc.ca>
Content-Type: TEXT/PLAIN; charset=US-ASCII

Jay:

I agree with the model of meaning/making utlined in your

note. I guess I wasn't clear in my own. I was attempting to comment on the issue of practice/s re. lchc. What kind of *practice* are the notes/notes. ? why do we have this kind of "conversation". Who speaks and doesn't etc.... and w/in postmodernisms, how are these practices hooked up, or are they and how to old fashioned notions like agency. And if not, then why do we do lchc type things? the sociology of lchc, I s'pose, in the ol days, is what fascinates me. It is a very closed discourse, with strongly dominant voices- almost no students, almost no people of colour, no feminists not much except very dominant discourses/discourers. I want to participate but find I can't squeeze in, except at the margins where I don't want to be placed. so, every now and then I pop into the living room, mumble something inaudible and race out not entirely satisfying. Also, I get so many "private" messages and responses to my rare inputs. Gratifying, sort of. But also stigmatizing I would rather responses be public and instantiate greater visibility for minority scholars We're out here Mary Bryson--

19.31. Date: Sat, 10 Sep 94 12:34 PDT

From: Gen Patthey-Chavez <IEQ2GXP@MVS.OAC.UCLA.EDU>
Subject: Older feminist text
To: xlchc@WEBER.UCSD.EDU

Reading Foucault in English, then Giddens on Foucault, and reading German excerpts from the Age of Enlightenment, an old memory stirred and I dug up *Le Deuxieme Sexe*. I find myself rather delighted by de beauvoir's command of Foucault's medium, despite the 1948-view of history. Two excerpts seem a propos in the present discussion:

A propos d'un ouvrage, d'ailleurs fort agacant, intitule *Modern Woman: a lost sex*, Dorothy Parker a ecrit: "Je ne peux etre juste pour les livres qui traitent de la femme on tant que femme . . . Mon idee c'est que tous, aussi bien hommes que femmes, qui que nous soyons, nous devons etre consideres comme des etres humains." Mais le nominalisme est une doctrine un peu courte; et les antifeministes ont beau

jeu de montrer que les femmes ne sont pas des hommes. Assurement la femme est comme l'homme un être humain: mais une telle affirmation est abstraite; le fait est que tout être humain concret est toujours singulièrement situé. Refuser les notions d'éternel féminin, d'âme noire, de caractère juif, ce n'est nier qu'il y ait aujourd'hui des Juifs, des Noirs, des femmes: cette négation ne représente pas pour les intéressés une libération, mais une fuite inauthentique.

Dorothy Parker wrote about a rather irritating work entitled Modern woman: A lost Sex: "I cannot be fair to books that concern themselves with women as women . . . My idea is that we all, men as well as women, whoever we are, have to be considered (first?) as human beings." But nominalism (??) falls short as a doctrine, and anti-feminists play a good game of showing that women are not men. Doubtlessly women like men are human beings but this is an abstract assurance. The fact remains that every particular human being is always singularly situated. To refuse the notions of l'éternel féminin, the black soul, the Jewish character does not amount to a denial of the contemporary existence of Jews, Blacks, and women: That refusal is not liberating for those concerned; it amounts to a dishonest/inauthentic flight.

(Beauvoir, 1949, Vol 1:13)

A la fin d'une étude approfondie des diverses figures des sociétés primitives Lévi-Strauss a pu conclure: "Le passage de l'état de Nature à l'état de Culture se définit par l'aptitude de la part de l'homme à penser les relations biologiques sous la forme de systèmes d'oppositions: la dualité, l'alternance, l'opposition et la symétrie, qu'elles se présentent sous des formes définies ou des formes floues constituent moins des phénomènes qu'il s'agit d'expliquer que les données fondamentales et immédiates de la réalité sociale." Ces phénomènes ne sauraient se comprendre si la réalité humaine était exclusivement un mitsein basé sur la solidarité et l'amitié. Il s'éclaire au contraire si suivant Hegel on découvre dans la conscience elle-même une fondamentale hostilité à l'égard de toute autre conscience; le sujet ne se pose qu'en s'opposant: il prétend s'affirmer comme l'essentiel et constituer l'autre en inessentiel, en objet.

At the end of a study of diverse figures in primitive societies, L-S was able to conclude: "The passage/transformation from a state of nature to a state of culture is defined by man's ability to think about biological relationships through (under) systems of oppositions: Duality, episodic transitions, opposition and symmetry, whether they present themselves in definite forms or indeterminate ones, constitute less phenomena in need of explaining as fundamental and immediate givens of social reality." These phenomena could not be understood if human reality were exclusively a mitsein founded on solidarity and friendship. On the contrary, it becomes clear (they become clear??) when following Hegel one discovers in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility towards all other consciousness. The subject assumes himself only in opposing himself; he

pretends to affirm himself as essential in constituting the other as non-essential, as object. (Beauvoir, 1949, p.18)

ps translating philosophy ain't exactly easy . . . hope it was worth the effort

19.32. Date: Wed, 21 Sep 1994 18:36:20 +0100

[back to table of AL messages](#)

From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)

Subject: Search for J.G. Herder related addresses (English-language world)

To: dewey-l@ux1.cso.uiuc.edu, xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

Excuse those receiving this in multiple copy, please! Forward it to other platforms read by possibly interested persons! Thank you!

I am trying to find out e-mail or fax addresses of the following people and institutions related to English language translations and editions of works of Johann Gottfried HERDER to whom I would like to get in contact. This is in view of eventually inaugurating a Herder "slow reading list" of selected works. A number of German specialist might eventually participate in a general discussion forum on that fascinating though disregarded poly-math-poet.

Persons:

E.A. Menze

K Menges

Marcia Bunge

Institutions:

Penn State University Press

U. of Chicago Press

Fortress Press (Fortress Augsburg ?)

Books on Demand, Ann Arbor

Perhaps other persons or institutions interested in Herder and his work could be named to me including, if possible, their (e-mail or fax) address, so that I become capable of gathering a suitable database for furthering Herder issues on electronic media.

Here are the data presently known to me on available English language editions of works of Herder's. I would gratefully welcome any additions and emendations:

1. (1992) Against pure reason - writings on religion, language, and history. translated and edited by Marcia Bunge (Ed.) Fortress Augsburg (?), Fortress Press. 288 Pp. \$20.- ISBN 0-8006-3212-5

2. (1992) Selected works 1764-67. Translated and edited by E.A. Menze and K. Menges (Eds.) College Park, Pennsylvania State Univ. Press. 368 Pp. (Price ?) ISBN 0-271-00712-5
3. (19??) On the origin of language (1772). Chicago, Univ.Chicago Press. \$10.- ISBN 0-226-73012-3
4. (19??) Reflections of the philosophy of the history of mankind (1784-91). Ann Arbor Mich., Books on Demand. (Price ?) ISBN 0-836-77007-9
5. (1940) God. Some Conversations (1787) New York, ??
6. (1971) The spirit of hebrew poetry (1782f.). (Place, Publisher ??) (Price ?) (ISBN ?).

I would appreciate getting the detailed tables of contents of items 1 and 2 above.

To anybody interested I can send on demand in the form of an attachment file a list of Herder's major works (or, if you prefer, a nearly comprehensive detailed list) with volume & page references to the various major German language collected works editions. Please specify Operating System (Mac, DOS, Windows) and form (table for Spreadsheet or tab separated Text).

Many thanks for your help! Please send reply to my personal address, not to the list.

Alfred Lang

Alfred Lang lang@psy.unibe.ch
Psychology, Univ. of Bern

[next AL message](#)

19.33. Date: Wed, 12 Oct 94 17:27:43 EDT

From: brewer@cs.wmich.edu (Steven D. Brewer)
Subject: Cross cultural communication
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu
] From: Ian Jasper <ijasper@sun3.oulu.fi>

]

] The nation is usually presumed to be the only dimension along
] which culture is measured or taken to exist. That cross cultural
] communication must also take place between adults who are parents and
] those who are not, or between males and females is virtually unmentioned.

] Where other dimensions to culture are taken to exist the nation is taken
] as fundamental.

As an Esperantist this issue interested me a lot for several years. Being busy with other things, I haven't kept up as well for the past two years, but I did see a dissertation (published in the UK, if my memory doesn't fail me) that studied communicative difficulties between first and second language speakers and concluded that the primary difficulties resulted from a lack of shared common experiences. The real problems didn't have to do with the 'language' at all! One result of this was that second language speakers tended to understand each other better than when they spoke with native speakers. This has made a lot of sense to me, from the standpoint of being an Esperantist.

I've spoken Esperanto with people from many different countries and found it very easy to communicate, but one of the largest reasons for the easiness being that we had a shared base of experiences from which to begin a discussion -- namely having learned Esperanto. This allows one to discuss issues of learning, differences between languages, how Esperanto is perceived in different countries, what one does with other Esperantists in the home country, etc.

Just my \$.02.

--

Steve Brewer <brewer@cs.wmich.edu> | Se iu diras 'Mi havas korpon,' oni
http://141.218.91.93/WWW/I_sbrewer.html | povas demandi 'Kiu parolas tie ^ci
Science Studies WMU Kalamazoo MI 49008 | per tiu ^ci bu^so?' --Wittgenstein

19.34. Date: Thu, 13 Oct 1994 17:53:16 +0000

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)
Subject: Re: Cross cultural communication
To: xlchc@weber.ucsd.edu

Hi Steven,

your comment on communication being more a question of shared common experience rather than of shared code is very important. This is certainly at the base of Herder's thoughts on culture and the role of language in the community. Could you locate, please, the biblio of that dissertation you mention?

Best thanks, Alfred

Alfred Lang lang@psy.unibe.ch
Psychology, Univ. of Bern

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21. Tools 1995: 2 / 5

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21.1. Date: Sun, 08 Oct 1995 19:25:36 -0500 (CDT)

From: HDCS6@jetson.uh.edu
Subject: Tools
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

What is tools, as tools, really is not that important a concept at all? What if it is only a "primitive" way of engaging the question of how activity drives thinking? If we had a better technology for explaining this interation would cultural/social historical theory use the idea of tools at all? Have we taken a wrong turn and become bogged down in a side issue?

Michael Glassman

University of Houston

21.2. Date: Sun, 8 Oct 1995 22:39:11 -0400

From: BPenuel@aol.com

Subject: Tools

To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Michael's challenge--to articulate why the concept of tools is at all useful, is an important one to consider for sociocultural research. I think there's a good case for "tools" and "tool use," keeping in mind how sign-mediation has the potential to transform human activity. The introduction of sound for instance, to film, was not simply an "add-on" to the activity. It changed what counted as a good film and who could be considered a good actor, as Singin' in the Rain dramatizes.

From the actor-network view as well, in Latour's work one can find the role of tool as "actant" in a network, one that can be recruited in a complex rhetorical strategy by scientist, and one that recruits to it entire laboratories of scientists in the process of being included in scientific activity.

I'm sure others have examples?

Bill Penuel

PreventionInventions

139 Holly Forest

Nashville, TN 37221

21.3. Date: Mon, 9 Oct 1995 13:48:46 +0000

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)

Subject: Re: Tools

To: xmca <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Michael Glassmann's challenge to review the concept of tools encourages me to remind the fact that most current ideas of mediational tools have not only some process in mind but also some substantive character, refer in a dominating sense to mediating objects. This is true of the most prominent language tools, words, sentences, and of current sign concepts in general. Even gestures and other less codified communicative events take on a kind of substantive character as soon as we try to operationalize them.

Now this appears to be somewhat misleading because it suggests, that the tool's mediating function, as a pre-existing entity, is also between pre-existing entities to be mediated between, subjects and objects or whatever, and the mediation is somehow added to the items to be mediated in the form of the tool. This makes it difficult to conceive of the change of the entities involved when they enter a relation or result form a relation and have developed a different potential than what they had before. The supposed substantive character of mediators confers the relation a somehow static character and leads to some separation of the generative potential of the relation.

Alfred

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21.4. Date: Mon, 9 Oct 1995 16:13:52 +0100

From: eva.ekeblad@ped.gu.se (Eva Ekeblad)

Subject: Re: Tools, mediative relations

To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Yes, Alfred

The substantive character (and the "in some sense" pre-existence) would seem to be a decisive advantage of mediational tools: if the mediator wasn't in some sense THERE how could it function? (springboard of thought and action -- not "thin air").

On the other hand: thinking of gestures-words-and-sentences, they are only intermittently THERE, and verymuch only in "some sense" pre-existent. By being recognizable as The Same. So to call all kinds of mediators substantive, and pre-existent is perhaps stretching it?

Well, no. Let's keep the substantiality. It seem useful, even if it brings the risk of misleading us away from thinking in relations. Which is something that is very hard to consistently do, I agree. And, I suppose, even harder to communicate. It is very easy to begin to think and read as if Mediator was the bolt joining the me-thing with the what-I-do-thing. (Bad metaphor, but: as if we were talking about meccano pieces to assemble or put back in to the box). As if Textbook was always the same, and Students Clara and Jack also always the same... and a word like.... well, say 'cirrocumulus' -- also always the same... As if everything we deal with were neutrally exchangeable pieces. This is certainly how we try NOT to reason in this contextually aware community.

Hmm... does this sound as if I am arguing with you, Alfred? That was not at all my intention. It was just that you point to a problem that is very important to me, so I thought I would contribute to keeping it "afloat" in the discussion: how can we describe relational phenomena without evoking fixed-entities in the minds of our readers (including ourselves)?

It does not seem to be enough stressing the relational nature of mediation (among other things) when "writing theory" -- although I would certainly be interested to hear if you have further theoretical elaboration on the theme, do you?

Eva

nun

Eva Ekeblad

Univ. of Gothenburg, Sweden

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Box 1010

S-431 26 Molndal, SWEDEN

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nun

21.5. Date: Tue, 10 Oct 1995 22:57:32 +0000

[back to table of AL messages](#)

From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)

Subject: Re: Tools, mediative relations
To: xmca <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Eva,

no, I did not have the impression you were arguing with me, rather you seem to have an excellent understanding of my attempts to strengthen the relational character of mediating processes. It is difficult, indeed. Of course, there is something "there", ready in way to take the mediating role or function, but my point is that it changes character entering the relation, and differently so in the course of near replications. Think of household settings of long standing, and slightly supplemented and modified over the years, which bring the people together in quite specific ways. So what we have to investigate, I think, is histories of the relational systems in their entirety. I believe they will lead us to more readily see mediators in their dynamics. You will find the background of our ideas in the Non-Cartesian artefacts paper published in LCHC-Newsletter in 1993. We are now studying the dwelling process longitudinally, to some extent.

Alfred

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22. Types of semiotic 1996: 2 / 4

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22.1. Date: Thu, 18 Jan 1996 08:44:55 -0800 (PST)

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>
Subject: Peirce
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Gary-- I read a little on the Peirce list, enough to know his ideas are important to xmca readers. Alfred Lang has been trying to teach me the same lesson. Can you think of ways to specify the relationship between Peirce and the Russian cultural/semiotic/historical thinkers in the activity theory tradition? If we could get him back into the discussion, Arne would also have a lot to say. Are there, for example, any known clear contradictions between the ideas of Vygotsky and Peirce? Are they well known?

I know this is a big question and you may not have the time to answer, but your note on Ellul and Elementary Pragmatism in response to Cathy Legg set off the thought, in case it was timely.

mike

22.2. Date: Thu, 18 Jan 96 13:41 CST

From: Gary Shank <P30GDS1@MVS.CSO.NIU.EDU>
Subject: Re: Peirce
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Your question about links between Peirce and activity theory, Vygotsky, et al is so good that I want to drop offline for awhile and work on it. I have a few hunches, but I want to trace them down. Actually, it feeds in well for my AERA paper so I need to do it anyway :-)

gary shank

gshank@niu.edu

ps i wish i had the perspicacity and eloquence to say as much in so little a space as Leigh Star just did on arbitrariness. thanks Leigh for the wonderfully insightful post....

22.3. Date: Mon, 29 Jan 1996 09:03:32 +0100

[back to table of AL messages](#)

From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)
Subject: Vygotsky's adn Peirce's Semiotic
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

In a first response (we have exam period) to Mike's recent question as to Vygotsky's relation to continental and Peircean semiotic, I'd like to venture some background points:

Of the semiotics there are more than you or I can name. A reasonable taxonomy or even a genealogy of its species is not available. Yet it seems to me, that Mike's questions can only get a reasonable response on such a back ground. This alone also can give orientation to attempts at advancing the idea of semiotic in a cultural psychological context.

Some time ago I have ventured to distinguish 4 types of semiotic which include also an approximate genealogy: Roughly:

(A) Signs are seen as *_special objects_* that carry a meaning in addition to what they are. (Diagnostic signs, e.g.)

(B) Signs are complexes of symbols, "texts" in a general sense, which, when you run through them open-eyed and well-equipped will give *_meaning_* free that was not obvious before.

(C) Signs are well-defined *_elements of communication_* and refer to that what can be signalled from a sender to a receiver over a channel; although it is the signs that are sent, conveyed is a message that is encoded in the signs.

(D) Signs are entities that can have, in suitable circumstances, effects that they could not in any other circumstances. They are the real carriers of true evolution of any kind.

I send a section of that paper in a separate message. The above characteristics go perhaps a bit beyond what was said there, but it might help to understand.

Now, when asked to characterize Vygotsky's and Peirce's notion of sign processes, it is obvious in the beginning that they both go beyond (A) and (B). While (B) is prototypical for most Continental (Saussurean) semiotics with linguistic and literary etc. interests, (C) appears to have become the dominant semiotics in the wake of information technology which was so readily adopted by many psychologists. (D) gives a sign definition that will sound very strange even to most specialists with given habits of thought, perhaps less so to novices of the field. You can easily reduce it to the somewhat narrower perspective of interpretation (the interpretation of a sign reveals something not obvious before) that is dominant in most of the

several Peircean definitions of sign or semiosis. The question is then whether that something hidden in the sign, its potential, has been there before or whether it can also be that this is newly generated. In other words, whether sign interpretation, the usual pivot of semiotic, is in fact a case of sign generation, namely the creation (or actualization, modification) of another (new) sign.

I give 3 Peircean sign definitions below, one of a framing character, another rather typical one, and one of his latest years more peculiar to our interests.

As to Vygotsky I would say he also has gotten that basic innovation of the sign being something useful to do something. That later became "how to do things with words". So there is some touch of (D), yet he appears still somewhat nearer than Peirce to (C), while it was only Morris who introduced (C) into the semiotic world mistakenly attributing it to Peirce. Yet a bit more directly than Peirce Vygotsky emphasizes the pragmatic-instrumental character of the signs. While with Peirce, semiotic is basically a (the) theory of knowledge and perhaps as well the basic process that can evolve the world. With both authors I quibble as to why they did not give more thought to answers as to how signs come about or are brought about in the first place.

So much now, Alfred

-----Peirce quote 1, undatable, MS Robin 278:34?-----

There are three kinds of interest we may take in a thing. First we may have a primary interest in it for itself. Second, we may have a secondary interest in it, on account of its reactions with other things. Third, we may have a mediatory interest in it, in so far as it conveys to a mind an idea about a thing. In so far as it does this, it is a sign; or representamen.

-----Peirce quote 2, 1897, CP 2.228-----

A sign, or representamen is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen.

-----Peirce quote 3, 1909, 6.347, From Some amazing mazes...-----

[...] a sign endeavours to represent, in part at least, an Object, which is therefore in a sense the cause, or determinant, of the sign even if the sign represents its object falsely. But to say that it represents its Object implies that it affects a mind, and so affects it as, in some respect, to determine in that mind something that is mediately due to the Object. That determination of which the immediate cause, or

determinant, is the Sign, and of which the mediate cause is the Object may be termed the Interpretant [...]

-----endofquote-----

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Home (preferably): Hostalen 106, CH-3037 Herrenschwanden
Switzerland

22.4. Date: Mon, 29 Jan 1996 09:06:08 +0100

From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)
Subject: On types of semiotic (1300+ words)
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

see message on Vygotsky's and Peirce's semiotic.

From: Alfred Lang (1994) Toward a mutual interplay between psychology and semiotics, JALT 19(1) 45-66.

German version: Eine Semiotik f,r die Psychologie - eine Psychologie f,r die Semiotik. Pp. 664-673 in: Leo Montada (1993, Ed.) Bericht ,ber den 38. Kongress der Deutschen Gesellschaft f,r Psychologie in Trier 1992. Vol. 2. G`ttingen, Hogrefe.

[Introduction and short section on psychology]

Pp. 47-53 -

Semiotics:

Since semiotics is less well known, I need to go into a bit more detail. There is also quite a bit of content related specialization in semiotics. You can make out semioticians oriented towards linguistics, literature, the visual or auditory arts, philosophical, biological, or computational topics, public relations, fashion etc. etc. But those applied distinctions are less important here; so basic or formal distinctions only will concern us in this exposition.

Semiotics is often defined as the study of signs. This is similar to defining psychology as the science of behavior. In both cases, not much is said. Depending of what you mean by sign or by behavior, and depending on what aspects you emphasize in that study, you get quite different sub-disciplines which, by the way, need not be exclusive of each other. For an inclusive reference both in terms of topics and traditions of present-day semiotics and also including a large bibliography, I recommend Sebeok (1986).

Studying signs can focus; a) on signs as a special kind of object, b) on the meaning of signs, c) on the use of signs, and d) on the effects of signs.

a) Signs as Objects:

Still quite common in semiotics of today are variants of the classical approach going back to Aristotle, Augustine, Locke, Leibniz and many others. Signs are seen as special objects which have a special meaning and which can, in some respect, represent or substitute other objects.

The classical approach can be characterized by the famous phrase *Aliquid pro aliquo*, or "something for standing for another thing". A sign or signifier stands for something signified. The distinction between signifier and signified drawn by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure around 1900 has strengthened as well as expanded the traditional approach. If you look at signs as objects, you can then "botanize" signs, classify them and investigate whether the coordination between sign objects and sign meaning obeys rules and, if so, what kinds of rules.

Beyond linguistic signs, such as phonemes, letters, words or sentences, all kinds of matter and energy configurations in general and their components in particular can be treated as signs. By way of example, we can look at such phenomena as gestures (from everyday behavior to artful dance), exchange objects (from souvenirs to money), buildings (from huts to cities), and many other cultural codes (from traffic signs to law).

It is as useful and desirable as it is problematic and sometimes deadly to explore all kinds of lists of signs, with pointers to their respective meanings. Used with care, such encyclopedias of meaning are indispensable aids. All of us, in fact, have partial versions of such "lists" in our heads. However, the problems of this approach should also be obvious. Naturally, everything has its meaning or meanings; it just depends. In fact, the "signs-as-objects" approach goes astray in its attempts to multiply distinctions and definitions: signs against non-signs, this sign class against that, this variant of meaning, and so on. Furthermore, any classification is in a sense arbitrary, and can therefore be replaced by any other arbitrary classification.

b) The Meaning of Signs:

By looking at the discussion above, we can easily understand attempts at turning the object approach "upside down". Semiotics as the science of meaning is both a development of and a reaction to the centrality of the sign-object pairing. Variants of structuralism, to be seen as the principal movement of this approach, are based on the conception of distinctive features (inaugurated by Saussure and developed by Roman Jakobson, Jurij M. Lotman, Algirdas J. Greimas and others). The central tenet of this approach is a general notion of "text", referring to any phenomenon, including its elements and their relations, as if it were "composed". Structures of

distinctions within texts, and beyond in contexts, constitute meaning and signs, and not vice versa.

It is easy to see that, especially in fields such as literature and the arts, an important motive for producing signs is innovation. Catalogues of signs with fixed meaning can then become as much of a nuisance as a support. If you want to express something that has not been "said" before, you might need to "blow up" existing sign classes and categories. Examples are hard to clarify briefly. Think, perhaps, of a piece of music or architecture. Of course, you can list myriads of sign objects and suggest possible meanings for them. But it can be argued that you miss the "essentials" of the piece by following this procedure. Instead, the process of "going through" the whole of the "text" as a structured ensemble is assumed to generate its meaning. Therefore, this approach advocates the primacy of meaning.

c) The Use of Signs:

The third approach is the most commonly accepted today. It is based on some theory of communication, more or less influenced by theories of information exchange in technical or social systems. Here, signs are not conceived as either material objects or as mental meaning, but rather in terms of their function in communicative processes. Signs are considered vehicles or carriers of meaning. Naturally they must have a material basis, but their essence is the mediation of information between two systems.

This approach, perhaps quite characteristic of the technical *Zeitgeist* of the second half of the 20th century, owes much of its impetus to Charles W. Morris, a psychologist-sociologist- philosopher of American pragmatist descent. It has been taken up world-wide. Depending on what one prefers to accept as a communicative paradigm, there are dozens if not hundreds of sign function models. Furthermore, I think I can presuppose some knowledge of this approach by a psychological audience, since psychologists are used to thinking about models of information transfer between some sender and receiver, whether the examples involved are part of mechanical or computer systems or are living systems such as brain parts or human speakers and listeners.

I think that this focus on sign processes realized in communicative models is a great advance for semiotics. Yet this by no means renders the "object" or "meaning" approaches obsolete. On the other hand, the distinction and definition problems prevalent in the "sign-object" approach are only deferred rather than solved. Arbitrariness of initial definitions continues to plague the field. Instead of declaring this or that to be a sign, controversies and dogmatisms rage now over such questions as whether the concept of communication should include or exclude intentionality, whether or not a sender is obligatory, or whether communication presupposes a code or not.

d) Sign Effects:

Difficulties of the kind associated with the other three approaches have led a number of semioticians to propose or rather reconsider a more general approach to sign processes which might best be described as the investigation of sign effects.

These efforts are quite deliberately grounded in pragmatic philosophy. This comes as no surprise, since the founder of pragmatic or action-oriented thinking, Charles S. Peirce, is certainly the most influential modern semiotician as well. In fact, most of the concepts used today in all of the approaches described above (e.g. the icon-index-symbol distinction) are based on Peirce's work. This fourth approach is hopefully his living heritage.

Signs in this conception (similar to their definition in the "meaning" approach), are entities that should not be defined a priori and then classified. It is also not sufficient to functionalize traditional sign concepts as in the communication approach. "Signs", whatever else they are, are "born from" signs and "procreate" other signs. A sign, for Peirce, is anything that has the potential to, in suitable circumstances, create other signs. Thus the focus of this approach is on the role of "signs" in the becoming of signs. Semiotics, then, is the study of that type of causation which is carried on by signs. Most of what I have to say in the following about the mutual benefits from an interplay between semiotics and psychology should be understood as illustrating this fourth approach.

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Switzerland

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23. English on the Internet 1996: 1 / 35

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23.1. Date: Sun, 14 Apr 1996 13:39:06 -0700 (PDT)

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>
Subject: English on the internet
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

There is a lead story in the NY Times today about the internataion as international medium. The head of Glasnet in Moscow blasted the idea that it there is a level international playing field because of the overwhelming power of English in this medium.

It reminded me, as it might remind us all, of the terrific burden we put on our non-native-English speaker/writer/readers. My thoughtless use of SRCD yesterday bespoke this same unspoken set of assumptions.

In case I didn't get the message, a note from an xmca friend this morning brought home the point locally.

This issue is on my mind also since it appears that the Russian Student Association at Moscow U is actually getting things organized, and my concerns about how they were going to deal with language issues. It is on my mind because in seeking to make the journal, XMCA, international, we have to find some way to pay for translations. We found an Angel for the Latour piece coming up. Our Japanese colleagues got their text close enough so that we could work editorially in English. We are working with others in this way.

But the langauge assymetries are a problem impeding joint work.

I have no solutions to offer on xmca except to note my special thanks to the non-native-English speakers who take the trouble to read and comment in these discussions.

Anyway, its an issue worth being re-minded of.

mike

23.2. Date: Sun, 14 Apr 1996 18:04:48 -0400

From: "Ana M. Shane" <pshane@andromeda.rutgers.edu>
Subject: Re: English on the internet

To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Mike,

I caught your note on English on the internet in passing, just as I was about to go and make some nice spaghetti dinner for my little son and his friend. But I can't resist answering it immediately.

As a non-native speaker/writer of English, I am, together with all others like me, daily exposed to little nuisance problems: like a correct spelling and/or which is a right article: "a" or "the" etc. This does add another dimension to everything I do especially professionally where my predominant communication channel is (English) language. I know that most of the people who need to use a foreign language often feel oppressed or just exhausted and frustrated with it. But I want to give the whole issue another perspective. In spite of the troubles I sometimes experience, I feel a richer person. I think that knowing more than one language is actually an advantage in many ways. It opens up whole worlds to the one who takes a trouble to learn another language, wonderful worlds which otherwise stay completely shut off from you. It also gives you a perspective on your native language, a stance one cannot otherwise even imagine. Sometimes I feel that it became my habit to look at things from more than one angle - saying them in English and saying them in Serbo-Croatian means feeling them in different ways, opens different possibilities, brings different associations to mind. In fact, I am not so much frustrated with my own imperfections in English as I get frustrated when I cannot share an experience with somebody monolingual because that experience makes sense only in one but not the other language. And to conclude, I'll try my best to share in English something my grandfather used to say in Serbo-Croatian: "The number of languages you speak is the number of people you are worth". Does it make sense in English? Does it make sense on xmca in the light of all the discussions on the social construction of personality? For me it does.

Ana

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23.3. Date: Sun, 14 Apr 1996 19:30:46 -0400

From: Judy Diamondstone <diamonju@rci.rutgers.edu>
Subject: Re: English on the internet
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Ana,

As a monolingual who used to be somewhat literate in French, has several Beginning Spanish books on her shelf, lots of Inupiaq language resources, and a couple bi-lingual dictionaries, I can only say that the frustration you feel when you can't "share" a second- language version of an event is a frustration deeply felt by some of us who can't hear it. I have inklings of what it must be like to move in another language. It's world-making. Your grandfather was "right on" [translation: "Absolutely right" - U.S. popular culture; more specific reference? 1970s?.... I am foregrounding my own illiteracy in my own Native language!]

Judy

23.4. Date: Sun, 14 Apr 1996 22:12:13 -0400

From: "Ana M. Shane" <pshane@andromeda.rutgers.edu>
Subject: Re: English on the internet
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Judy,

Thanks. The "sharing" or its impossibility goes in both directions. From one language to another and back! If we put this issue back into the mind construction frame we'll get an interesting and let's say 3D picture of what could meaning construction mean in communication. There was recently a lot of talk about this and people agree that we don't "share" but, let's say "resonate", that we do not copy (decode) the other person's meanings, rather we construct and reconstruct meanings from the activity, and those meanings we construct are new and don't have to be a mirror image of the speaker's meaning.

However, the issue of different languages brings us back a little bit, to consider, at least, - shared conditions - for communication. Something has to be the same, shared between all the members of one language to some degree, or the communication (verbal at least) becomes impossible. I think that in the light of the cultural-historical approach and in the light of the agreement that meanings are not "shared - identical" but rather dynamically (re)constructed in each instance of a discourse, that in the light of all of that we still do have a problem of "shared - resonated". What does really happen? What are the minimal conditions for verbal communication and for meanings to start being constructed? What is the nature of these conditions? I think we can imagine a continuum of different conditions from one extreme, let's say: people of two different language cultures which (cultures) don't have any contact with each other, in a remote situation (over a phone - no non-verbal clues); to another extreme: people who grew up together and work together, in a close live conversation in a context of an activity they know well and have done many times before. So, between these two extremes, what are other possibilities, when does "understanding" start to break, when is the last possibility of

understanding left? I think we have a multidimensional phenomenon, in which each dimension can have many values. But what matters is relationships between these different dimensions (functions - for Vygotsky).

Now, if we try to answer Mike's "chocolate" problem and take up Gordon Wells on his offer to catalogue all those instances we all agree upon some principles, let's say that it would be interesting to find out whether we all agree about certain communicational conditions (dimensions) and what might these be?

I am just suggesting the "rules" of the game - but the game still has to be played in other postings.

Ana

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23.5. Date: Mon, 15 Apr 96 09:15:09 EDT

From: Robin Harwood <HARWOOD@UConnVM.UConn.Edu>
Subject: Re: English on the internet
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Ana wrote:

>But I want to give the whole issue another perspective. In spite of the
>troubles I sometimes experience, I feel a richer person. I think that
>knowing more than one language is actually an advantage in many ways. It
>opens up whole worlds to the one who takes a trouble to learn another
>language, wonderful worlds which otherwise stay completely shut off from

I've always felt that it would be a deeply enriching experience to be fluent in another language, to actually step inside a different way of conceptualizing the world, and to note those differences (and similarities!). Unfortunately, nonAmericans seem more likely to have this experience than Americans... I think you're right, though-- it definitely speaks to the issue of "sharedness" versus "unique construction" in any communicative act.

Robin

23.6. Date: Mon, 15 Apr 1996 09:40:58 -0700 (MST)

From: KEN GOODMAN <kgoodman@CCIT.ARIZONA.EDU>
Subject: Re: English on the internet
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

I've faced the issue of non-English readers in dealing with translations of my books. It's a particular problem because I make a conscious effort to provide real reading, writing and teaching examples. These are highly relevant for my American English audience and- I hope make my writing more authentic. In translations do we replace all the examples with authentic ones in the other language/culture(s) or do we go into detail to explain the English examples? Others must face these problems. In oral presentations being translated in Taiwan and Latin America recently I also find that my jokes don't always travel well.

Ken Goodman

23.7. Date: Tue, 16 Apr 96 00:19:53 EDT

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>
Subject: Re: English on the internet
To: X-MCA Discussion List Group <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Glad that Mike brought back the issue, raised by some others here before, of the relative ease or difficulty for various people of operating in English. As usual, those of us on the privileged side of this naturalized political economy of language (symbolic capital) are less likely to be aware of it as an issue.

One small thought I've worried for a long time now ... our current norms, especially for writing, in English have become as some call it hyperstandardized ... that is, there is profit in obeying a million trivial rules of form and usage that are really quite unnecessary for most communicative purposes. Those of us conditioned to these norms, and for whom obeying them is almost second-nature, tend to be quite uncritically horrified at the smallest deviations by those who use other dialects of English, much less by those whose English is in-progress or to some degree nativized by hybridization with their first language.

We could all relax and communicate more comfortably if we would critique our linguistic prejudices, relax the rules a bit, and let everyone feel free to contribute in their own variation of English without feeling or being judged as intellectually inferior because of spelling or verb agreement. I think we have begun to learn to do this in the email medium. I would be willing to extend it to the academic print medium, but I don't think that will ever happen. I also recognize that I'm still viewing the issue from a privileged position, and issuing my call for tolerance from a position of not needing very much of it myself.

Sharing five or six major world languages among enough people to have a multilingual discussion in a large listgroup seems completely unfeasible ... but at least saying that English as a language is richer for the variety of forms that non-native speakers produce offers a positive climate for less language-inhibited communication.

JAY.

If U kan rEd this, U ar dooing sum guud lingwistiksk!

JAY LEMKE.

City University of New York.

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23.8. Date: Tue, 16 Apr 1996 07:57:53 AST

From: "Russ Hunt" <HUNT@academic.stu.StThomasU.ca>

Subject: Re: English on the internet

To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Agreeing with Jay and Mike on the way the dominance of English privileges the linguistically handicapped, I'd like to point out that the presence of people for whom English is a second -- or fifth -- language in a context like this has a strongly salutary effect on people who might otherwise be "English teachers" about the shibboleths Jay calls

- > a million trivial rules of form and usage that are really quite
- > unnecessary for most communicative purposes,

and who

- > tend to be quite uncritically horrified at the smallest deviations
- > by those who use other dialects of English.

It's much more difficult (not impossible, but you really do have to be an ignoramus) to exercise that sort of snobbishness when the person you're talking with obviously is not a native speaker.

- > Sharing five or six major world languages among enough people to
- > have a multilingual discussion in a large listgroup seems
- > completely unfeasible ... but at least saying that English as a
- > language is richer for the variety of forms that non-native
- > speakers produce offers a positive climate for less
- > language-inhibited communication.

Hear, hear.

```

-- Russ
      _|~_
Russell A. Hunt      _|~_)_ __)_|~_  Department of English
St. Thomas University  )_ __)_|_)__ __)  PHONE: (506) 363-3891
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      \                /
~~~~~ http://www.StThomasU.ca/hunt/hunt.htm ~~~~~

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23.9. Date: Tue, 16 Apr 1996 20:04:27 +0100

From: eva.ekeblad@ped.gu.se (Eva Ekeblad)
 Subject: Re: English translations on the internet
 To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Ken Goodman wrote about the problems of translating teaching examples. I have been irritated for a long time with educational qualitative researchers in my neighbourhood who use a lot of interview excerpts translated from the Swedish and given only in English. So I have picked up from anthropologists to give excerpts in the original language with some suitable kind of crib or translation in English. I use this wherever I can, unless I have to refrain for reasons of space. I should think that the technique could be used in the reverse when it comes to examples of spoken English included in a translated book. Of course this does not solve the problems of translating a whole context to another culture... across differences in curriculum and classroom organisation

Then, when it comes to multilanguage discussion on the net I guess Jay is right about the difficulties of doing these parallels -- especially as we are not quoting but "speaking for ourselves", and then why first write in Swedish and then make a translation? Or who else would intertranslate us??

Now, if I say goodbye in Swedish I will probably upset the codes of many of = you.

says Eva: Adj=F6 s=E5 l=E4nge!

23.10. Date: Tue, 16 Apr 1996 20:04:23 +0100

From: eva.ekeblad@ped.gu.se (Eva Ekeblad)
 Subject: Re: English on the internet
 To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

The issue of being English netted is naturally one that interests me greatly. I would like to crochet that back with learning as transformative appropriation. I guess that having English as my second language (not my fifth) I am quite privileged in the context. I could also say that English is my second skin: I wonder sometimes whether it is the English or me that has been most transformed in the entrance process. As if these things could be measured...

But phenomenologically I experience a change in myself -- after all this reading, writing, thinking and conversing in the English of Academe. One little thing is that there are concepts that I have difficulty finding Swedish words for. (Well, probably this is an up-scaling and accentuation of the transformation of becoming an Academic.) Using English in one's PhD thesis certainly means being appropriated. Made proper and obedient-to-rules. Though some resistance in the Heyoka spirit probably helps -- if you are skilful enough to look obedient enough in other quarters. Or to obey tongue-in-cheek.

It's been a long time now that I have felt that I have the right to make the English mine, and to transform it as I appropriate it. Allowing myself to have a reciprocal relation to the language. Even allowing myself not to know completely how appropriate or inappropriate my transformations are... although I tend to keep within limits. I try to know what I do. For a small example I generally don't allow myself to let my fingers slip when typing messages to the xmca (as I have always prided myself over having an inbuilt spelling-checker in my reading eyes). Of course they do anyway. Fingers slip and eyes slip, and messages get sent in haste. I even may sometimes have an inappropriate spelling among my habits, although I would like to think not... ((long pause)) I wonder why?? It's as if I have to prove my right to play with language by first showing that I play on a ground of correctness... hmm...

Well

enough for one posting

Eva

23.11. Date: Tue, 16 Apr 1996 18:18:13 -0300

From: =?iso-8859-1?Q?JO=C3O?= BATISTA MARTINS <jbmartin@sercomtel.com.br>
Subject: Re: English on the internet
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

I have read the comment about english on internet and I see any correlations with the intercultural experience.

When I enter in the red I feel integrated at social universe more ample. One universe what extrapole my da by day experiences. I feel the world...

Obviously I dont understand much things because I am not the english native speaker, much terms stay flying in my mind - I ruminate it. This experience make possible to me to get the proper sense to the e-mails as my life history, as cultural history...

Much people argue what the internet is incorrect politically because the language predominant is the English which don't make possible the mundial integration.

The communication over internet - to those what don't speak English - is much arduous because we don't can to utilize others linguistic resource as gesture, etc... which facilitate the understanding/communication. Despite of difficulties I feel what I am working with you

At one normal situation - where the peoples are joints - I think what is more ease overcome the differences because we can to utilize others communication'channels. In the sense I don't agree with Mike when he said: "But the language assymetries are a problem impeding joint work."

The term assymetries for me have much senses: differences, assymetry due the power relations... But, I think what the encounter between human being makes the field of possibility , made culture - this is our feature, no?

PS: Any day I write my mail in Portuguese. I think what you go like...

JOAO BATISTA MARTINS

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23.12. Date: Tue, 16 Apr 96 20:45:46 EDT

From: Robin Harwood <HARWOOD@UConnVM.UConn.Edu>

Subject: Re: English on the internet

To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Eva wrote:

>is my second skin: I wonder sometimes whether it is the English or me that
>has been most transformed in the entrance process. As if these things could
>be measured...

>

>But phenomenologically I experience a change in myself -- after all this
>reading, writing, thinking and conversing in the English of Academe. One

Eva, thank you for your thoughts here. I can think of no better reason for learning a second language than what you describe here. The possibility of seeing things in genuinely new ways, of experiencing ourselves and others in ways that we never have before--and of offering others the opportunity to experience themselves

differently through contact with us. The monolingual blinders of most Americans (myself included) are truly limiting...

Robin

23.13. Date: Wed, 17 Apr 1996 00:53:59 -0400

From: "Ana M. Shane" <pshane@andromeda.rutgers.edu>
Subject: Re: English on the internet
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Thank you, Jay!

I also think that English (as a person!!!) is a most generous language allowing all kind of guest words and expressions to feel at home and become members of the household. More so than any other language I know. I have usually experienced laments for "purification" by speakers and policymakers of other languages I know. But in English, one can meet a most fantastic variety of exotic "foreign" words, feeling quite OK about themselves. From classic Latin and Greek words, through various African ones, to Russian, Hebrew, Spanish, French, German and who knows what else. And if you think of it, standards of grammar are not something so old, they came with more widespread literacy. Every language changes all the time - it is literacy that slows it down and makes it look stable, fixed and sometimes dead. (Bakhtin). So, thank you, Jay, you are waking it up and making it alive again.

Ana

If yoo kan reed de abav, mins yoo R aleiv end vel.

23.14. Date: Wed, 17 Apr 1996 14:46:34 +0200

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)
Subject: Re: English on the internet
To: xmca <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

In my view, participating in a community where the basic vehicle of interacting is not one's primary "nature" -- English language as a second language in my case -- is a privilege much more than a burden. Not so much for reasons of widened horizon, functionality of a larger community, world wide communality or whatever reasons of that kind have been mentioned. My point is rather that by expressing anything in just one single medium, or even by exchanging influence on just one channel, one runs a higher risk of becoming enslaved by particular connexions of referents and signs, some of which we like to call truths or laws etc. Being instigated by that kind of participation to express any idea or feeling or argument twice, i.e. in two different forms, helps in getting those clearer, more sensible. Sometimes it also contributes to becoming (perhaps over)sceptical in view of the modern sciences being so

much victim of nominalisms, of taking words and their operationalisations in terms of supposed categories of facts for reality. It supports a sort of triangulation: something in the focus of two (or more) perspectives is obviously more trustworthy than something just seen and expressed, though perhaps a bit less easy to deal with. Being forced to get hold of something -- whether apparently factual or more virtual -- in several sights gives that something more chances. It furthers abductive procedure rather than fixations. Is not psychology at large quite victim of a single-minded conformity?

So much for the individual gain, in that my perspective in a way enhances that expressed by Eva Ekblad. But in addition, I think that a related kind of triangulation takes place on XMCA anyhow, within the one English language medium -- just because so many and different voices are not only uttered but also sensibly received and taken up. This requires an agreed upon form. I comply with Jay that overscrupulous form deviations should not be taken as a basis for judging those who commit them. But I am not so sure as Ana when she applauds the changeability of English and so emphasizes the medium's flexibility. It was Fritz Heider who in 1921 already has pointed out that a medium is useless in both cases: when it is too resistive because of its own character and when it is too adaptive to what it is to confer because of no proper character. The English language today, in my opinion, is perhaps quite a bit on the flexible side; too many people are then tempted to recognize "the" reality in the words, while, when language resists, you realize, a text is a version of something beyond, a form of some set of conditions and a phase of some ensuing effects. Indeed, as Mike Cole hinted at in another context: "when words are remembered, 'automatically'" then "culture becomes transparent", i.e. not properly valued.

Alfred

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Switzerland

[next AL message](#)

23.15. Date: Thu, 18 Apr 1996 01:50:41 +0200

From: raeithel@informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)
Subject: Liebe Amerikaner (was Re: English on the internet)
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Liebe Amerikaner,

um Euch mal einen Eindruck davon zu geben, wie es sich liest, wenn man nur halb oder gar nicht derjenigen Sprache mächtig ist, die man da gerade vor sich hat: darum schreibe ich diese Einleitung in deutsch.

One of my colleagues here, Joern Scheer from Giessen, opened his lecture to the latest International Congress for Personal Construct Psychology <somewhere in Australia> with a similar foreign looking or sounding paragraph.

In the following I quote mechanically from the past flurry of xmca mails. Notice, please, the curious mixture of temporal signs in the date-and-time stamps that my Mac-Eudora (a mailing program) automatically produces (in world time there is a strict temporal order -- under the condition, that is, that everybody has set her/his system clock with the necessary caution):

At 20:04 16.4.1996, Eva Ekeblad wrote:

>... I could also say that English
>is my second skin: I wonder sometimes whether it is the English or me that
>has been most transformed in the entrance process. As if these things could
>be measured...

At 18:18 16.4.1996, JO=C3O BATISTA MARTINS wrote:

> Obviously I dont understand much things because I am not the englisch
>native speaker, much terms stay flying in my mind - I ruminate it. This
>experience make possible to me to get the proper sense to the e-mails as my
>life history, as cultural history...

At 20:45 16.4.1996, Robin Harwood wrote:

>The possibility of seeing things in genuinely new ways, of experiencing
>ourselves and others in ways that we never have before--and of
>offering others the opportunity to experience themselves differently
>through contact with us. The monolingual blinders of most Americans
>(myself included) are truly limiting...

At 00:53 17.4.1996, Ana M. Shane wrote:

>I also think that English (as a person!!!) is a most generous language
>allowing all kind of guest words and expressions to feel at home and become
>members of the household. More so than any other language I know.

At 14:46 17.4.1996, Alfred Lang wrote:

>In my view, participating in a community where the basic vehicle of
>interacting is not one's primary "nature" -- English language as a second
>language in my case -- is a privilege much more than a burden.

Well, Alfred, *I* think it is a very heavy privilege to bear on one's shoulders if one hasn't the time slots necessary for diving into that other way of expressing oneself. Not every academic tradition like the ones of the small countries up north or right in the rich western core of Europe have the soil for their Studentengarten to grow the sort of scientists/scholars for whom modern latin is a second skin.

And, on conferences, there are sooo many unfeeling Americans these days, talking like -- pick your favorite hi-speed metaphor here -- in their native US dialect...

And so on.

Sure, Jay is right about English being one of the best ways to

write/speak as a foreigner. But behind language is difference of culture. And I am thinking these days that Americans aren't Europeans anymore.

Remember my last one on that, Jay ?

Nevertheless, I enjoy reading the xmca English quite a lot.

ARa.

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23.16. Date: Wed, 17 Apr 1996 19:10:44 -0700 (PDT)

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>
Subject: danke Arne
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Ya, k sozheleniu, ne znaiu Nemetskovo yazika. I bedni Yapontsi pishut tozhe drugim shriftom.

My fate has been to acquire Russian as a (barely) passable reader/speaker/understander/inostranets and to be rewarded with a variety of explanations of why I totally fail to understand anything in Russian, let alone Californese!

mike

23.17. Date: Thu, 18 Apr 1996 07:56:36 +0100

From: eva.ekeblad@ped.gu.se (Eva Ekeblad)
Subject: Re: English on the internet
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Alfred, you make a couple of good points. First one that is very close to thoughts that I often have (and try to broadcast...):

>My

>point is rather that by expressing anything in just one single medium, or
>even by exchanging influence on just one channel, one runs a higher risk of
>becoming enslaved by particular connexions of referents and signs, some of
>which we like to call thruths or laws etc. Being instigated by that kind of
>participation to express any idea or feeling or argument twice, i.e. in two
>different forms, helps in getting those clearer, more sensible. Sometimes
>it also contributes to becoming (perhaps over)sceptical in view of the
>modern sciences being so much victim of nominalims, of taking words and
>their operationalisations in terms of supposed categories of facts for
>reality.

And then one that made me really stop and think (a very useful function):

>when language

>resists, you realize, a text is a version of something beyond, a form of
>some set of conditions and a phase of some ensuing effects.

-- yes, I can agree that there is something good in the resistance of language. When the relation between me and words doesn't always run smoothly that's a signpoint of contact with reality, I guess. But how tell the difference from the effects of nominalisms and worship of definitions?

Eva

23.18. Date: Thu, 18 Apr 1996 07:56:40 +0100

From: eva.ekeblad@ped.gu.se (Eva Ekeblad)
Subject: Re: danke Arne
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

K=E4raste br=F6der -- systrar och v=E4nner

Mike, you make me curious. This was totally opaque to me:

>Ya, k sozheleniu, ne znaiu Nemetskovo yazika. I bedni Yapontsi pishut
>tozhe drugim shriftom.

-- all I can guess is that coming from you it is in some way relevant to the language thread...

Whereas Arne's intro I could read. German being my third, mute listener language...

I was just wondering, Arne, whether your complaint about hi-speeding conference Americans directed to the xmca isn't a little like the teacher who scolds the part of the class that is present for the absence of the absentees...

On the other hand you drop an interesting seed about the difference of European diversity and American diversity.

>Sure, Jay is right about English being one of the best ways to
>write/speak as a foreigner. But behind language is difference of
>culture. And I am thinking these days
>that Americans aren't Europeans anymore.

Eva

I-know-I'm-privileged

23.19. Date: Wed, 17 Apr 1996 22:40:27 -0700 (PDT)

From: Amy Ohta <aohta@u.washington.edu>
Subject: Re: Liebe Amerikaner (was Re: English on the internet)
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Arne-san,

Eigo de zenbu wo yomu no wa taihen darou to omou n desu ga, ganbatte kudasai!
Iroiro na kuni kara no sanku ga aru koto wo arigataku omotte orimasu!

(Hang in there with reading it all in English! I appreciate the participation by people from other countries!)

For those of you who speak/read Japanese--excuse my strange romanization--I am the child of the 'word processor Japanese' generation! Perhaps computing will eventually have an impact on how Japanese is romanized!

Amy

Amy Snyder Ohta (aohta@u.washington.edu), University of Washington
Asian Languages & Literature, Box 353521, Seattle, WA 98195

23.20. Date: Thu, 18 Apr 1996 12:56:35 +0200

From: raeithel@informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)

Subject: Re: hi-speed talkers

To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Oh yes, you are right, Eva, my ...

>... complaint about

>hi-speeding conference Americans directed to the xmca [was] like

>the teacher who scolds the part of the class that is present for the

>absence of the absentees...

I just had to air this thought, unjust as it is by retrospect. The worst I recently experienced was an Irishman racing on in his special dialect... Another fine example is a Bavarian (like me) who is already hard to understand for Northern Germans, and has learnt his English from his Italian friends, complete with the tempo...

Teachers also are often unjust with their accusations against labeled wrong-doers, aren't they ? But this is certainly still more frequent in the industry and commerce...

The native English hearers also have an advantage in following foreigners talking conference English -- it's not only on the presenter's side. And here is where US Americans from the cities and universities have their greatest plus, as far as I can see, apart from the competitive culture, the training in making good talks and decisive points.

Arne.

23.21. Date: Thu, 18 Apr 1996 10:10:19 -0500

From: tkoschmann@siumed.edu (Timothy Koschmann)

Subject: Re: hi-speed talkers
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

>The native English hearers also have an advantage in following
>foreigners talking conference English -- it's not only on the
>presenter's side. And here is were US Americans from the cities
>and universities have their greatest plus, as far as I can see,
>apart from the competitive culture, the training in making good
>talks and decisive points.

>

>Arne.

Arne,

Your point about native English speakers having an inside-track advantage in technical presentations is no doubt well-taken. I would like to point out, however, that this has not always been the case---just a few decades ago the lingua franca in certain research disciplines, such as chemistry was German! Perhaps you just had the misfortune of being born in the right place at the wrong time.

---Tim

23.22. Date: Thu, 18 Apr 96 11:57:04 EDT

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>

Subject: Re: English on the internet

To: X-MCA Discussion List Group <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Thanks to Joao for the ideas of his message, but also for giving me some insight into how Portuguese puts words and meaning together differently from English, and perhaps a tiny inkling of how English must sound odd to native speakers of his lingua. What a wonderful mirror to try to see ourselves in -- is that why we try so hard to cover these mirrors over? why we demand perfect English, or perfect Portuguese, so we will not have to hear and struggle with the unnaturalness of our own language conventions? not have to see/hear them as arbitrary, as limiting as well as empowering, as not a mirror of the way things are (or a transparent glass through which to see them), but as our special lens and filter? And how much easier to acknowledge that there are different such lenses that we can switch, if we never have to experience what happens when they blend in print and speech, as they surely must do in us. How strange that a culture like ours that so much prizes ego-integration insists on total language schizophrenia. JAY.

JAY LEMKE.

City University of New York.

BITNET: JLLBC@CUNYVM

INTERNET: JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU

23.23. Date: Thu, 18 Apr 96 12:09:00 EDT

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>

Subject: Re: English on the internet

To: X-MCA Discussion List Group <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Yes, among the European languages, English is rather welcoming of foreign words and expressions. Is this partly an effect of its own mongrel history? Anglo-Saxon had little choice about accepting Norman-French words into its vocabulary..., and indeed in those days before standardized national languages (i.e. before the late 18th early 19th c.) there were not separate and distinct languages as we think of them today (except perhaps for Latin).

It may also be partly a luxury of the dominance of English, which can afford some 'dilution' of its imaginary historical purity, which more globally marginal languages (dare I say French? certainly German) don't seem to feel they can afford. I can well understand language-cultures resisting the steamroller of English, and its infiltration of their vocabularies. English has little need to take such a defensive stance, being the aggressor language.

Of course all of modern European culture has a hidden investment in the idea of separate and distinct languages, cultures, nations. As it did formerly in its notion of separate and distinct human races, and as it still does in the parallel notions for class, gender, sexual orientations, etc. Let us learn to speak rather of the Englishes of the world, and Englishes of every US city, as we can hear here the Englishes of our xmca friends.

JAY.

JAY LEMKE.

City University of New York.

BITNET: JLLBC@CUNYVM

INTERNET: JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU

23.24. Date: Thu, 18 Apr 96 12:32:08 EDT

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>

Subject: Re: hi-speed talkers

To: X-MCA Discussion List Group <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Just a point of view from a native Englisher about conference English. I find most of my fellow native speakers have a terrible time with any divergence of dialect or second-language speaker variety of English. It is only because of my diverse and mostly superficial (but it's enough) experience of other languages' sound patterns

and grammatical tendencies that I think I am better at this than others. So I sort of doubt that being a native English speaker confers an advantage in understanding other varieties of English. In fact I sometime find that non-native speakers understand each other better than native speakers understand their special forms of English.

There is also, of course, an art to speaking English for maximum comprehensibility by non-native speakers. When I return from being away and using this special variety, I sometimes get odd looks from my fellow native speakers because I tend to go on using it when it's not needed.

I suppose I could try writing more in this way here on xmca, but I have not yet learned how to be subtle or poetic as well as easily comprehensible. I apologize for troubling people to ruminate (as Joao put it) for too long to make some sense of what I sometimes write. JAY.

JAY LEMKE.

City University of New York.

BITNET: JLLBC@CUNYVM

INTERNET: JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU

23.25. Date: Thu, 18 Apr 1996 10:37:46 -0700 (PDT)

From: Amy Ohta <aohta@u.washington.edu>
 Subject: Re: English translations on the internet
 To: X-MCA Discussion List Group <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Jay,

Yes, you're sure right about our Anglocentric computing environment--even at many large universities getting computing capacity (especially email capacity) in languages which do not use alphabetic scripts (Japanese is a good example) is impossible--our pleas seem to fall on deaf ears, even though such capacity would give language students and researchers access to a wonderful diversity of academic communities worldwide.

Amy

Amy Snyder Ohta (aohta@u.washington.edu), University of Washington
 Asian Languages & Literature, Box 353521, Seattle, WA 98195

23.26. Date: Thu, 18 Apr 1996 14:46:04 -0600 (CST)

From: Rosa Graciela Montes <rmontes@cca.pue.udlap.mx>
 Subject: Re: English on the internet

To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

I started this in reply to Mike's original message but haven't read the rest of the messages yet, so don't know where the discussion is going at this point.

I participate on another list where the language issue has come up at least twice. It's a list for those interested in Latin American languages and linguistics and has a fairly varied participation with respect to disciplinary background (linguists, translators, Spanish teachers and students, computer people) and also language background (Spanish, English, Brazilian).

Some six months back one of the participants started insisting that only Spanish should be used. He complained explicitly about the "imperialism" of the rest of the Net/Web and made a cause about having this space for Spanish. I'm not sure he said it explicitly but he certainly conveyed an attitude of "let THEM see what it feels like to struggle with a language not your own". Others who (coin)/sided with him were Spanish speakers living in the States, who appealed for the use of Spanish on the basis of this being one of the few places where they could talk with others in Spanish. Finally (luckily), what prevailed was a laissez faire attitude where each speaker was free to choose what language to write in and what language to respond in. Communication was definitely not a problem: most of the participants are obviously bilingual or at least proficient both in English and Spanish .. and ... there were no complaints about posts in Portuguese, for example. So it was obviously a more ...I'm not sure what word to use ... political? visceral? reaction to posts in English.

Now, a couple of weeks ago, the same person who started the previous discussion wrote another fairly acrimonious note referring to some writers' code-switching between English and Spanish. This led again to a very prescriptive discussion about language and language use. References to keeping language "pure", not using "bad" Spanish, not "corrupting" it with loanwords etc. Again there were a number of responses, mostly from linguists, stressing that a language grows, flows, changes and that no stage in a language is better or "purer" than another. Aside from that for those of us who are constantly interacting in both it's sometimes very "desgastante" (tiring, takes a lot of effort) to try and keep them separate.

This, just to illustrate how the issue has come up elsewhere.

Mike's post was aimed perhaps at working out or thinking through some policy issues for xmca. I think the concern is how to make the very rich discussion accessible to others and at the same time allow for others' voices to be heard. I know that in my case I'm always finding discussions that I would like my students to at least be able to read, that are relevant to what we're talking about in class or relevant to their research foci but there's a limit to how much I can translate and organize for them, there's just too much information and things flow too fast.

English will probably remain as the principal language of use among us, and that's ok since it seems to be functioning as a lingua franca for the community. But (just wondering out loud) what happens in multilingual, multicultural societies, how DO they get organized? Wouldn't it be possible in this microcosm to find some way of facilitating communication and at the same time allowing others to use their own voice (adapting existing tools, designing others, adapting forms of interaction) that might even provide a model that could perhaps be transposed to larger multilingual communities/societies? Wishful thinking..I have no answers, just mounds of messages that pile up for sharing with my students....

Rosa

Rosa Graciela Montes
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23.27. Date: Thu, 18 Apr 1996 17:18:45 -0700 (PDT)

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>
Subject: why worry?
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Hi all who have commented on the language issue and those reading over our shoulders.

Eva-- What I wrote at the top of my note, thanking Arne (Danke Arne) was in transliterated Russian. For more than a decade, owing to various technical factors in the beginning and then my own unfamiliarity with a cyrillic keyboard, I have corresponded with Russian colleagues via email in this strange way. And it IS strange. A colleague sent me a note using cyrillic characters to represent English and WOW was it hard to read!

I read Russian, but slowly, especially if the prose is dense, so I have a pretty good sense of what it would mean to take a serious part in READING a Russian conference like xmca and if I were to try writing in the conference it would provide lots of laughs.... as my talks do when I am in Moscow... because I freely make up words (Russian is wonderfully generative that way) and I am understood "double" - - both for what I was trying to express "correctly" AND for the interesting way in

which I cobbled together bits to make the standard meanings, and perhaps some other interesting variants, visible.

Rosa- The Latin American group is an interesting alternative case for all the reasons you indicate. And, of course, locally here in San Diego, our belief that Latino kids benefit from being allowed to express themselves any way they can, including lots of code switching, comes in for criticism. Maybe your case arises from a commonality between Spanish and French culture? :-)

My wife tells me my personality changes when I speak Russian. She isn't happy about the change! But it does indicate that learning alternative languages/cultures opens one up to a broader exploration of being in the world.

mike

23.28. Date: Thu, 18 Apr 1996 22:47:05 -0300

From: =?iso-8859-1?Q?JO=C3O?= BATISTA MARTINS <jbmartin@sercomtel.com.br>
Subject: Re: hi-speed talkers
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

At 12:32 18/04/1996 EDT Jay wrote:

>I apologize for troubling people to ruminate (as Joao put it) for too long to make some sense of what I sometimes write. JAY.

Jay, I am more calm when I receive and send mails over internet. The exercise of english (mainly to read and to write) making myself to think and to rethink ours ways of communications. To ruminate, for me, means to stay thinking about... search senses.

One difficulty of this exercise is to find the correct significance of words... The word have several meaning (e.g. is significance or meaning?) and who can find these is the native speaker...

I think what when we are not secure of expressions we "ruminate", seeking one mean to speak. These things remember myself of egocentric speech

- I understand the egocentric speech as one manner of interiorization of significance - and this for me is much important because amplify my understanding of things and of reality. Thus dont have motive for you request apologizes... (at least for me...)

JOAO BATISTA MARTINS
jbmartin@sercomtel.com.br
UNIVERSIDADE ESTADUAL DE LONDRINA

ADDRESS: RUA RENE DESCARTES, 349
LONDRINA - PARANA - BRASIL
CEP 86060-600

23.29. Date: Thu, 18 Apr 1996 20:00:50 -0600 (MDT)

From: Phillip Allen White <pwhite@carbon.cudenver.edu>
Subject: Language hegemonies
To: xmca <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

To add another story to Rosa Graciela Montes' narrative:

I have friends and relations in Latvia, and one result of the recent independence from the old Soviet Union has been the sudden value of the English language. Under the Soviets Russian was the dominant language. Latvians had a joke that nationalists, meaning themselves, spoke two languages (Russian & Latvian) while internationalists, meaning Russians, spoke one language (Russian). While theoretically the Soviets honored multi-lingualism, practically Russians expected all nationals within the Soviet Union to speak Russian. And, so, social and economic advancement depended upon a Latvian becoming fluent in Russian.

Now, for social and economic advancement, English is becoming a valued language, since this is the language used in international business as well as being seen as an informational source. A friend who learned Russian only and not English has suddenly found herself not having the same degree of access to information, because the new information in her field (child psychology) is entering Latvia in English text.

Other friends who are fluent in English are finding better job opportunities. Family members with young children are emphasizing English as the second language to be learned. Those who previously taught Russian are having a hard time finding a job.

And it also seems that many Latvians are worried about the influx of English words. The last time I was in Riga, friends all complained that no sooner had they gotten rid of the hegemony of Russian, that suddenly English was everywhere. I did notice that all of the signs in Russian were gone. But I didn't see any signs in English. It was a while before I realized that all of the English had been incorporated into the written and spoken text of Latvian. Now, Latvians are worried about the purity of their language.

Languages spoken by small groups of people (There are not quite two million Latvians in the world.) are struggling to exist.

Phillip

pwhite@carbon.cudenver.edu

23.30. Date: Fri, 19 Apr 1996 07:52:08 +0100

From: eva.ekeblad@ped.gu.se (Eva Ekeblad)
Subject: Re: why worry?
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Hi Mike

I first thought I'd make this a backstage whisper, then saw no reason to.

I was a bit puzzled when you write:

>Eva-- What I wrote at the top of my note, thanking Arne (Danke Arne) was
>in transliterated Russian.

-- yes, that was obvious to me (and I liked your narrative on your relation to the language). But I still cannot read Russian, and I was wondering what you said (am I missing something here?)

>Ya, k sozheleniu, ne znaiu Nemetskovo yazika. I bedni Yapontsi pishut
>tozhe drugim shriftom.

Amy gave a parallel for her Japanese but your Russian just sits there as an icon of itself. I can make the guess that it has something to do with writing, that's all.

Why worry?

Well, not really worry. But I think that it has been (it is) very interesting and enjoyable to get a peep into the diverse other-sides that we bring to this shared interface of xmca-english.

Eva

23.31. Date: Fri, 19 Apr 1996 07:09:26 -0700 (PDT)

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>
Subject: Sorry Eva!
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Oh-- I was being dense, Eva.

What I wrote, was "I, unfortunately, don't know German. And the poor Japanese also have to write using a different writing system." It was nice of Amy to pick up that exact theme, but dense of me not to include the translation.

Lets be generous to me and attribute it to the fever I have been running the past couple of days.

mike

23.32. Date: Fri, 19 Apr 1996 10:14:15 -0400

From: Judy Diamondstone <diamonju@rci.rutgers.edu>
Subject: Re: hi-speed talkers
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Hi, Joao,

you wrote:

> One difficulty of this exercise is to find the correct significance
>of words... The word have several meaning (e.g. is significance or meaning?)
>and who can find these is the native speaker...

Joao, your message reminds me of how much even our native language is foreign to us, not our own, and requires a constant pursuit for the "correct significance," a constant struggle to infuse the word (in Bakhtin's terms) with our own intentions-- How much more difficult across languages, I can barely imagine.

You also said:

> I think what when we are not secure of expressions we "ruminate",
>seeking one mean to speak. These things remember myself of egocentric
speech
>- I understand the egocentric speech as one manner of interiorization of
>significance - and this for me is much important because amplify my
>understanding of things and of reality.

Yes, yes! I like your interpretation of egocentric speech as the interiorization of significance (the appropriation of word meanings intimately linked to our "ideological becoming") -- that's what it's all about (making language opaque and available for transformative uses).

Thanks....

- Judy
Judy Diamondstone
Graduate School of Education
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

10 Seminary Place
New Brunswick, NJ 08903
diamonju@rci.rutgers.edu

23.33. Date: Fri, 19 Apr 1996 18:53:29 +0100

From: eva.ekeblad@ped.gu.se (Eva Ekeblad)
Subject: Oh, I see...
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

thanks, Mike for enlightening me.

Not understanding the Russian I had missed most of the musical modulations
connecting your posting with Amy's.

Take care

Eva

23.34. Date: Fri, 19 Apr 96 14:29:47 EDT

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>
Subject: Re: why worry?
To: X-MCA Discussion List Group <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Mike's personality seems to change when he constructs social reality with Russian mediation vs. English mediation ... not perhaps too surprising ... but it certainly reminds me a that wonderful quote (was it Ana M Shane from Serbo-Croatian?) that we are worth as many people as we have languages?!

Has there been interesting research on identity construction among bilinguals that touches on such issues? JAY.

JAY LEMKE.

City University of New York.

BITNET: JLLBC@CUNYVM

INTERNET: JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU

23.35. Date: Fri, 19 Apr 96 14:16:21 EDT

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>
Subject: Re: English on the internet
To: X-MCA Discussion List Group <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Other probably know cases of multilingual-multicultural communities in more detail or from more firsthand experience, but I have read a number of ethnographic accounts (India is a frequent site, but also aboriginal-contemporary Australia) that make me believe that multilingualism is a very natural state and that humans by and large cope with it quite well, may even not consider it a problem at all.

The most common pattern seems to be, as described for that netgroup, that each speaker is free to speak in the variety of his/her choice, and to respond in the same or another variety. (This applies, by the way, to polydialectal communities, too.) When there are problems of communication, there are usually bilinguals around who mediate/translate, and sometimes there are even multi-party chains of translation/interpretation/contribution. What one has in effect is a fully collaborative group activity in which communication, or more centrally, the advancement of the state of the action, is jointly accomplished, and various language codes are employed as needed and wanted as tools.

Our notion of exact and precise translation is not foregrounded in these communities. What matters is more the social effect of what is said, speech as a mode of action, rather than language as strict form.

Overlaying this basic linguistic democracy of course are the almost inevitable status, power, and preference differences among the varieties, which usually simply reflect those of their core speakers' social groupings. There is also a fair range regarding 'purity'; some groups seek to keep their variety as distinct as possible, others are content with code-mixing. I do not know if anyone has tested my previous hypothesis re English that politically dominant languages are more tolerant of borrowings than marginalized ones.

I would be very interested to hear more from others about the 'natural strategies' of multilingually-mediated activity in real communities. JAY.

JAY LEMKE.

City University of New York.

BITNET: JLLBC@CUNYVM

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24. Dialectics 1996: 1 / 17

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24.1. Date: Thu, 02 May 1996 21:16:33 -0400 (EDT)

From: Bill Blanton <BLANTONWE@conrad.appstate.edu>
Subject: Ref for Arne's historical connections
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Earlier Mike mentioned a piece written by Arne Raeithel the ancestry a CHAT. The reference is

Raeithel, A. (1991). Activity theory as a foundation for design. In C. Floyd, H Zullighoven, R. Budde, & R. Keil (Eds.) Software development and reality construction (pp. 391-415). Berlin: Springer-Verlag.

Judy, I found the chart of historical connections very helpful. Arne also provides some discussion on a Marxist conception of human activity, followed by five essential attributes of human activity. The last section on epistemological implications of the five attributes is very interesting reading. The reader gets a different "feeling" about activity theory. I suppose this comes from Arne's schooling in the early German influence. When you read it , you will see what I mean.

Bill Blanton

24.2. Date: Fri, 3 May 1996 11:26:46 +0200

From: raeithel@informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)
Subject: Re: different "feeling" about activity theory
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Bill, I found your remark intriguing:

>... The last section on epistemological implications of
>the five attributes is very interesting reading. The reader gets
>a different "feeling" about activity theory. I suppose this
>comes from Arne's schooling in the early German influence.

For me it is very hard to see what you mean by re-reading this old text, of course. I would be happy to learn where you found contrasts to other presentations of the CHAT ideas, because this would perhaps help me to understand the "different feeling" that I have when I read North American texts...

In re-reading the text I hit upon this part of a paragraph:

>... a renaissance of the Vygotskian approach to the social
>formation of mind (Wertsch 1985) is well on its way. The
>development of an interdisciplinary and scientific theory of
>the formation and development of social, collective knowledge
>seems now possible, if the many valuable contributions to such
>an end that have been produced by scholars of other backgrounds
>(e.g. Mead 1934, Elias 1987, Bourdieu 1977) are taken into
>account. In my view, the Marxian approach to societal and
>cultural development will be able to fulfill this task - just
>because it is going through a *healthy crisis* presently.

This was written in 1990, and I would not write it again today. In going back to the roots, to Hegel and other German Idealists, and comparing how those same sources were taken up in the early American pragmatist philosophy, and later educational and cultural politics (Dewey, New Deal, ...) my then already weak conviction has evaporated. A Marxian approach as such is presently non-existing, and whether there will be a renaissance or some new synthesis in the next century, I simply cannot say, and, what's more, I don't even care...

My present reckoning is that the conceptual net, and the methodological procedures, of CHAT can stand on their own, there being no need anymore to anchor them in a definite reconstruction of their history.

Arne.

24.3. Date: Sun, 5 May 1996 17:40:27 -0600 (MDT)

From: vera p john-steiner <vygotsky@unm.edu>
Subject: Re: different "feeling" about activity theory
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Arne,

I am wonderinh whether it is possible to have a dialectical approach to psychological phenomena, for instance the CHAT view of the relationship between individual and social phenomena without dialectics? And dialectics as developed by Marx, Engels, etc.

Vera

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24.4. Date: Mon, 6 May 1996 20:13:20 +0200

From: raeithel@informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)
Subject: Re: dialectics and CHAT
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Vera,

there are many historical variants of "dialectics", before Hegel and after Marx, and of course Hegel's work. I regard these essentially as precursors of today's theories of evolution, history and development. It is not possible to "have" a cultural-historical theory without a conception of history and development, of course.

I believe that today's students would profit much from reading the historical sources, but I am sure that studying specific developmental or historical problems is much more fruitful than those very general texts on dialectics as a meta-logical tool for understanding every- thing vaguely as everchanging because of internal contradictions. I am not saying that you would advocate using them, to be sure. They were quite widespread here in Germany in the early seventies, and I am glad they aren't available anymore. They caused a lot of unjustified superiority feelings ("we have the better theory"), but didn't help in any specific way those doing research, as far as I know.

In any case, here, at present, there is no chance for Marx or Engels.

Arne.

24.5. Date: Tue, 7 May 1996 22:18:00 +0200

From: engestro@helsinki.fi (Yrj^ Engestr^m)
Subject: Re: dialectics and CHAT
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

At 20:13 5/6/96, Arne Raeithel wrote:

>Vera,

>

>there are many historical variants of "dialectics", before Hegel

>and after Marx, and of course Hegel's work. I regard these essentially

>as precursors of today's theories of evolution, history and development.
>It is not possible to "have" a cultural-historical theory without
>a conception of history and development, of course.
>
>I believe that today's students would profit much from reading the
>historical sources, but I am sure that studying specific developmental
>or historical problems is much more fruitful than those very general
>texts on dialectics as a meta-logical tool for understanding every-
>thing vaguely as everchanging because of internal contradictions.
>I am not saying that you would advocate using them, to be sure.
>They were quite widespread here in Germany in the early seventies,
>and I am glad they aren't available anymore. They caused a lot of
>unjustified superiority feelings ("we have the better theory"), but
>didn't help in any specific way those doing research, as far as I know.
>
>In any case, here, at present, there is no chance for Marx or Engels.
>
>Arne.

I and my Finnish colleagues could not have developed our empirical brand of activity theory, namely developmental work research, without getting seriously immersed in those vague and general texts on dialectics. Ilyenkov's attempts at making dialectics more substantial and based on analysis of concrete material (such as Marx's Capital) were particularly important. The very concept of contradiction is practically missing or used only as an everyday notion in much of the current sociohistorical and situated literature. I find this gap a source of tremendous weaknesses in analyses of empirical data.

Here, at present, there is a renewed need to study and appropriate critically Marx and Engels.

Yrjo Engestrom

24.6. Date: Wed, 8 May 1996 12:06:12 +0200

From: raeithel@informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)
Subject: Re: dialectics and CHAT
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

At 22:18 7.5.1996, Yrj^ Engestr^m wrote:

>I and my Finnish colleagues could not have developed our empirical brand of

>activity theory, namely developmental work research, without getting
>seriously immersed in those vague and general texts on dialectics.
>Ilyenkov's attempts at making dialectics more substantial and based on
>analysis of concrete material (such as Marx's Capital) were particularly
>important. The very concept of contradiction is practically missing or used
>only as an everyday notion in much of the current sociohistorical and
>situated literature. I find this gap a source of tremendous weaknesses in
>analyses of empirical data.

>

>Here, at present, there is a renewed need to study and appropriate
>critically Marx and Engels.

>

>Yrjo Engestrom

It is clear for Germany, too, that the contributions to activity theory would not have been developed without the renewed interest in a Marxist approach to history and politics at the end of the sixties. I would point to the same sources (e.g. Ilyenkov) when asked where a good text on dialectics is found. Additionally, I always recommend Yrjo's book as nearly the only one handling contradictions in a manner suitable for empirical research. It is, however, only available by photocopying, and similar or even more severe problems of getting other important texts are quite typical.

I haven't denied a possible *need* for a critical re-appraisal of Marxian social theory and empiry, especially for those who have built their work on that basis. I wrote about *chances* of doing this here, and together with the next generation. Germany is obviously different in having the internalized version of the present restructuring of the former east/ west polarity, and the historical failure of the command socialism is presently nearly non-separable from the scientific value of historical materialism, and dialectical philosophy (quite different from party pamphlets). For many, me among them, it is clear that there must be very serious flaws in the grand theory. Yet, to discuss this has proved impossible. People have either thrown everything overboard, or still hold to every old conviction.

So, in this respect, too, I see the present situation as one where we need to understand most how to further cooperation and communication as relations that supersede contradictions, without silencing those.

Arne.

24.7. Date: Wed, 8 May 1996 21:28:14 -0600 (MDT)

From: vera p john-steiner <vygotsky@unm.edu>

Subject: Re: dialectics and CHAT
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Arne,

There was no chance for a dialectically oriented theory of psychology in the USA in the late sixties and early seventies, nevertheless, we worked on *Mind in Society*. The postscript that I wrote with Ellen Souberman was considered very poor by many of my closest friends, and perhaps it is, but it tried to address the challenge of thinking in ways that emphasize unification as a developmental process, quantitative and qualitative changes, etc. I think that it had an impact on some.

We have just finished an article for the *Educational Psychologist*, a very mainstream publication in which we have a short section on Ilyenkov, it was cut back because the readers, in several cycles of criticism wanted none of it, but a small section survived. It should be out in September and we will circulate it. It is hard for me to think of historical-cultural theory without a central role for dialectics. And I do hope that Germany, the historical home of Hegel, Marx and Engels, is not a totally closed forum for the varied re-interpretations of dialectical thought and progressive action in a new and saddened, informed, and transformed sense of what is being explored in countries such as Brazil, and in some form even in Hungary and Poland, etc.

Vera

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24.8. Date: Thu, 9 May 1996 17:17:00 +0200

From: raeithel@informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)
Subject: Re: dialectics and CHAT
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu
Cc: xcsa@rzaix52.rrz.uni-hamburg.de (eXtended Completely Serious Amusement)

The Motto of the "Afterword" (written by Vera John-Steiner and Ellen Soubermann) of the collection "*Mind in Society*" makes Friedrich Engels speak thus to us from a distance of just about a hundred years:

--- quote from Engels' "Ludwig Feuerbach..." --- numbers added by ARa --

--- as translated in the "Selected Works" of Marx & Engels, Moscow 1953

The great basic idea that the world is not to be viewed as a complex of fully fashioned objects [1], but as a complex of processes [2], in which apparently stable objects, no less than the images of them inside our heads (our concepts) [3], are undergoing incessant changes [4] ...

In the eyes of dialectical philosophy, nothing is established for all time [5], nothing is absolute or sacred. On everything and in everything it sees the stamp of inevitable decline [6]; nothing can resist it save the unceasing process of formation and destruction [7], the unending ascent from lower to the higher [8] -- a process of which philosophy itself is only a simple reflection within the thinking brain [3,6,9].

--- end quoting Engels, 1886 German, 1889 Russian, 1894 French ----

The interesting thing here is, dear Vera, that you two selected a piece that depicts *Hegel's dialectical philosophy*, and does not mention any addition that would be specifically Marxian. To be sure, all of this is told as belonging at the same time to the bundle of core concepts of the Dialectical and Historical Materialism of Engels after the death of Marx (in 1883, age 65).

The piece on Feuerbach is also interesting because it shows how badly Engels misconstrued Feuerbach's philosophy in their political consequences. Ludwig Feuerbach, the son of Anselm, if I remember correctly, in any case: the son of the man who took Kaspar Hauser under his wings until this prince was killed for good by hired men; Ludwig criticized Hegel as any good feminist of today would do it: Too much stress on and because of rationality; the body, making love and children, and all dreary reproductive work, totally forgotten in his grandiose world-plan; too fascinated by steam engines and too much anxiety of mathematical structures at the same time; in short: oblivious of the living beauty of public mind, mutual love and mutual aid...

Engels doesn't illustrate this side of Feuerbach, rather he insists on the importance of the *materialist turn* of L.F.'s New Philosophy, and then goes on to rally for big industry, productivism, progress. Still some decades before Lenin's "Soviet Power and Electricity", but quite evidently with all kinds of outdated ideas. They shine up in the quote above, and I am now going to refute them in a few words each:

[1] Nearly nobody still believes in the world as a "complex of fully fashioned objects" except perhaps some of the 200 year old society beyond the great lake (they call themselves "creationists").

[2] "A complex of processes", yes, of course. Please give a more precise description: What kind of dynamics ? Simple, linear ? Or turbulent with fixed recurrence times ? Or chaotic ? If the latter, can you name the specific attractor ?

[3] Oh god! A mirror theorists: "images of objects in our heads" are to be understood as "our concepts" ?? How about words, how about the coordination of measurement devices, how about written concepts ? This man is a Cartesian !

[4] Incessant changes, haha. How about all of the old structures that resist any change ? How about the nearly instantaneous re-installment of Russian religiosity ? -- And don't give me that old opium story again !

[5] Except that some Soviet leaders thought that the Scientific Socialism had indeed been established for all times. And, there **are** **some** things that **may** be established for all times: If you let three lines intersect on a perfectly plane plane, you will measure the sum of the internal angles as making up exactly half of a full circle. As every schoolboy knows...

[6] Yes, yes, we know this loaded slogan: "the stamp of inevitable decline...". Many, if not most, social democrats of your time already saw the inevitable decline of Capitalism. "Inevitable" -- the most dangerous concept in politics...

[7] "the unceasing process of formation and destruction" -- What a male chauvinist picture, either creating or destructing, eh ? No power left for caring, reproducing, conserving, et cetera, all those "secondary contradictions" ?

[8] "the unending ascent from lower to the higher" -- hmm, so the people in the colonies also might become industrialized ? Or is it the party hierarchy, from the young pioneers to the chair of the central committee ? Which models what ?

[9] Philosophy is just a reflection in the thinking brain !! -- see [3]. Friedrich, you hoped to see the end of all philosophy, see [6], a variant. But: Lo and Behold, it is still among us, and has left Descartes way behind. Doubtless would you be pleased to see what has become of the philosophical materialism today: The absolutely ruling set of ideas. Evolution known by the vast majority, history acknowledged by all.

I do believe that the best Engels of today is Jostein Gaarder.

Really !

If he weren't such a Platonist...

But he gets one into hard thinking, solid fantasy, artistic dreams.

Even at age 50+ ...

Says: Arne.

24.9. Date: Fri, 10 May 1996 20:48:32 -0600 (MDT)

From: myriam nohemy torres <myto@unm.edu>
Subject: Re: dialectics and CHAT
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Vera,

Nowadays the chance for a dialectically oriented theory of psychology seems to me even more remote. At any rate I think that a full understanding of Vygotsky's method requires us to dig into his understanding of Marx's dialectics.

Myriam
Myriam Torres
University of New Mexico
College of Education

24.10. Date: Thu, 09 May 96 21:27:56 EDT

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>
Subject: Re: dialectics and CHAT
To: X-MCA Discussion List Group <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

If Vera is willing to share them with us, I would be very interested to know what specific objections might have been made by critics to an account of Ilyenkov, or any approach based on dialectics, contradictions, etc. in her article for _Educational Psychologist_.

I certainly congratulate her and her colleagues for working through the difficult process of passing the intellectual censors who seem more interested in keeping new ideas out of the community than inviting them in. I don't know what they can be thinking, but I'd at least like to hear what they're saying! JAY.

JAY LEMKE.
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24.11. Date: Sat, 11 May 96 14:17:31 EDT

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>
Subject: dialectics today
To: X-MCA Discussion List Group <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

I think it may be useful for us to discuss the varieties of dialectics, and perhaps even the dialectics of dialectics, since dialectics as theory, method, or even meta-method, by its own thesis, must change in history.

So our dialectics is not quite anymore Engels', nor Hegel's, nor in some ways Marx's, however much we may admire their developments of dialectics and dialectical 'models' (the idea of a 'model' is really too static for dialectics, isn't it? even 'a theory' is not what a dialectics ought to give us ... a 'living praxis' maybe? a dynamic simulation? hmmm ...)

Arne is not so charitable to Vera and Ellen's Engels, but he also seems to me to be smiling a bit even as he criticizes the old propositions, probably because he knows that our smug modern superiority largely rises from just such 19th century breaks with prior philosophy and social theory.

I think we can give a bit more credit, even in contemporary terms, to the notion that "apparently stable objects ... are undergoing incessant changes" for there are still many such objects that have not yet been generally rethought in dynamic much less dialectical terms, for example notions of Universal Grammar, of necessary principles of logic and reason, Arne's own example of mathematical truths, dialectics itself perhaps, most classical theses about cognition, the principle of democracy, the notion of 'truth' itself, and really quite a lot of things that, say, postmodernism has tried lately to deconstruct (with a very dialectical set of subverting strategies). How about our notions of what a theory ought to be? Don't we still imagine that theories ought to be sets of stable propositions, when dialectics tell us this cannot be, for how could stable propositions model social realities all aspects of which are subject to 'incessant changes'?

Dialectics is as freshly radical today as ever in Engel's time.

Engels includes our concepts in the flux of dialectic change, and I will charitably assume his 'mirror' view of them is merely poetic. I am not sure our theoretical praxis, however, even yet fully takes into account that it should be natural that our most basic concepts (culture, history, learning, mind, ...) should and must be changing and are not 'absolute or sacred'. This does not mean, dialectically, that we simply modify these concepts, as if there were a definite and unchanging referent for them, but that we abandon and replace them with totally different concepts in the dynamics of cultural history. The time scale for such changes is clearly not longer than a human lifetime today.

'Inevitable decline' is an interesting phrase, evocative for me, and I think for people of that day, of the upsetting implications, as then understood, of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, invoked here, I assume as a rhetoric against the bourgeois view of Progress as the natural form of change in its view of society. What rises, falls. Western cultural and political hegemony, for instance. Fashionable theories (i.e. well-established and accepted truths), for instance. Philosophy as a discipline,

say. Or physics. Are we really quite comfortable today with such a notion as a commonplace? I don't think so.

'Formation and destruction' is another shorthand for dialectic. I agree with Arne that Brahma the Creator and Shiva, Lord of Destruction, are lonely without Vishnu the Preserver, and that Western masculinism may be implicated in marginalizing the supportive, sustaining, nurturing, helping dimensions of human activity as boring, or feminine, while usurping creativity (which females have long had prior claim on, much to our male womb-envy) and glorifying Destruction (instead of understanding it as part of ecological balance and harmony, and not an excuse for personal glory, cruelty, aggrandizement, or domination). But this is still a matter I think we are not so clear on: that sustaining is not the contradictory of change, but a part and aspect of change, and change of sustaining. Some serious dialectical thought about this might have much to say about the social aspects of human development, or about forces of fundamental social change that are not mainly about 'breaking eggs'.

'The unending ascent from lower to higher' was of course the evolutionary thesis of the time, and we have had some long and interesting discussion in this group about the relationship between developmental-dynamical-dialectical models in general, and various notions of Progress and 'progression'. What seemed clear in Engel's day, and is much more confusing for us, is in what sense, if any, higher is also better. If 'higher' means what the dialectics of change in complex dynamical systems leads towards, then it is at most 'more complex, more differentiated, more integrated, requiring more information for its description in any adequate frame' and even that only for some possible histories and for some portions of the whole. There are always a lot of broken eggs lying around and behind any complex whole (failed mutants/variants, degraded environments, etc.) Today I think it is easier to see that this process does not necessarily lead to anything 'better' (by which criteria? from what stage of evolution?), and is not necessarily something we should actively seek for ... but then we have rather little choice except to participate in it one way or another.

So I think we can also read Engels as still very much challenging our praxis today, as I suppose Vera and Ellen wished him to do.

JAY.

JAY LEMKE.

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24.12. Date: Sat, 11 May 1996 21:10:19 -0600 (MDT)

From: vera p john-steiner <vygotsky@unm.edu>
Subject: Re: dialectics today
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Dear Arne and Jay,

After receiving Arne's message concerning the Engels' quote I thought that it would be a good idea to think about some of his analyses. I had also hoped that others would join the discussion. Jay's message is the kind of comment that I was thinking about.

First, why did we use the particular quote, (and I no longer remember whose choice it was). It was because of the section in *Mind in Society* on methodology in which Vygotsky urges the adoption of a process rather than an object orientation. Why did we emphasize in our postscript dialectics without going into a deeper analysis of its many political and philosophical uses? Because we were deeply interested in a non-Platonist, non-Behaviorist psychology. And as most of you know, the process of developing a developmental, process-oriented, dialectical approach is hard. Our colleagues from South America (see *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, Dec. 1995) rightly suggest that we have reduced some of Vygotsky's works in the English translations --they kindly focus on *Thought and Language*-- but *Mind in Society* is also open to similar criticism. They recall Luria's role in this. We worked with Luria but we also made some judgements of our own. My objective was to participate in an effort to construct an interactionist-dialectical approach, although my primary interest was and is in the relationship between language and thought. It is because of his analysis of that relationship that Vygotsky became my "distant teacher." I am not a philosopher, nor am I a Marxist scholar, I did not experience first-hand the many ways in which dialectics was used and distorted politically. But I do think that Vygotsky's use of unification of "nature and culture" of "learning and development" is a dialectical approach on which we have all built some aspects of our own analyses.

I agree with both Arne and Jay that the 19th century belief in scientific progress, the male bias towards mastery and destruction, a reflection theory of thought are behind us, and rightly so. I have done too much research in Native communities to accept a High and Low concept of societies. As far as process and complex systems are concerned, I think Jay's analysis is excellent, it has some family resemblance to the notions of functional systems used by Luria and Newman, Griffin and Cole, and to the theories of complexity, some of which are fashioned at the Santa Fe Institute.

We share, we challenge and we appropriate from a complex legacy and by our very passions for ideas we help each other, I believe, to survive the many horrors of this century.

Vera

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24.13. Date: Sat, 11 May 1996 21:50:45 -0600 (MDT)

From: vera p john-steiner <vygotsky@unm.edu>
Subject: Re: dialectics and CHAT
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Jay,

Basically, the reviewers wanted us (my co-author is Holbrook Mahn, a terrific graduate student here at UNM) to delete our section on dialectics and focus on educational implications of CHAT. On the surface that seems like an understandable request, but in reality, it meant leaving out some of the most important features of our framework when contrasting it with social constructivism. The latter was part of our task.

I am not sure that I see it as censoring, but more as a deep unease with what one discussant referred to as "Soviet socio-cultural theory."

Thanks for asking,

Vera

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24.14. Date: Sun, 12 May 1996 09:00:42 -0500 (CDT)

From: HDCS6@jetson.uh.edu

Subject: Dialectics (In praise of Engels)
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

I remember reading a quote in the beginning of a book about dialectical biology (actually it was called *The Dialectical Biologist*, though I can't remember the authors at this moment) a dedication to Engels that essentially said that Engels was wrong a lot, but when he was right, he was as right as anybody in history. I think that his is really true. He was, from what I have read of his life and of his work, a romantic (odd to say from the way we talk about Marx and Engels today) who would spin web upon web in defining the development of the human condition. But his core ideas (such as the use of tools, and the use of language as a tool in the negotiation of labor) were extraordinary insights into the development of humanity. A great deal of what is going on today in social sciences owes a debt to Engels that is rarely recognized. But there is also a problem when we speak about Engels, especially in a place like xmca, or when we are writing about Vygotsky and/or CHAT. I have definitely read in one place, and I believe in at least one other, that Engels felt that his theory (and Marx's) was not meant to be used as a psychological theory. It was an economic (sociological) theory. Thus economists and sociologists have a much easier time applying it than people who have a direct interest in ontological human development. Any time that it is used in such a sense we are going to get into some type of trouble. I think that may have been what Arne was pointing to, and it may be the reason that somebody who joined the list recently felt that there was only a superficial understanding of dialectical materialism. We have trouble applying Marx and Engels and the philosophical implications of dialectical materialism because they really do no suit many of the things we are trying to accomplish.

So what is to be done about it, especially considering 1) Engels ideas have so many important implications for the way we think and 2) Vygotsky and other CHAT theorists have recognized these implications and tried to incorporate them into their theory? Well, this is going to sound kind of radical (maybe) but I think that if you are involved in an ontological theory of human development you have to abandon the whole notion of a philosophically based dialectical theory. I just don't think it's going to happen (There was a conversation about this a couple of years ago). There are a number of reasons for this (e.g., human beings develop at a very different rate than many aspects of their environment). I don't mean that you abandon dialectics, just trying to find a philosophical application of dialectics (Illynkov notwithstanding). Instead, we should turn towards the dialectical theory embedded within biological development (again, we get this explicitly from Engels and *The Dialectics of Nature*). Maybe, again, this is what Arne was talking about in his message. I think, on some level, Vygotsky recognized this, and that is why he tried to deal with it through his three levels of development (evolutionary, cultural historical, and ontological).

Well, I've probably been as opaque as I possibly could be on this Sunday morning. But before I go I just can't resist this one last rhetorical trick. Isn't it amazing that our

thinking has progressed to the point where we no longer see things as actually progressing (Ta dum dum).

Call your mothers!
Michael Glassman
University of Houston

24.15. Date: Sun, 12 May 1996 16:12:55 +0200

From: raeithel@informatik.uni-hamburg.de (Arne Raeithel)
Subject: Re: dialectics today
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu
Cc: xcса@rзаix52.rz.uni-hamburg.de (eXtended Completely Serious Amusement)

Dear Vera and Jay,

it's surely a wonderful experience to have a hang-over on Friday, because of the tour-de-force done on Thursday, under the influence, of ripping Engels to pieces, then forget about that on Saturday, giving a Seminar on the Rep-Grid-Technique [see later: Re: affect (cultural differences in...)], going to a birthday party to discuss, among other themes, the recent ritual here between green/autonomous fighters against atomic-energy-waste-proliferation and green/white uniformed defenders of the state authority. And finally using a pause in writing work on Sunday, to find your wonderfully serene and horizon opening answers to my calling out, pro-vocation.

Ah, yes, I can see the dialectics today, too.

And I have even looked up the context of the quotes in one of my oldest main sourcec (Selected Works, vol. II). The German title of the quoted article is: "Ludwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie". How is this translated in the English version of this canonical book of Soviet Philosophy ? I don't know, I don't own it.

The variants would be:

- * L.F. and the end ...
- * and the result ...
- * and the exit ...
- * and the way out ...
- * ... of classical German philosophy

To re-read it diagonally, looking at my markings and scribbles in the margins (25 years old) to find those two suspiciously unmarked places where Ellen and Vera

took the quotes from, was **fascinating**, and I found several con-texts that resonate strongly with several points that you two, Jay and Vera, have raised.

The second part of the quote in "Mind and Society", p 120, comes actually first in the article, and speaks about the power of the Hegelian "system", of course "as rightly understood after the materialist turning, putting Hegel who stood on his head again on his feet..." (on ca the third page of the article):

>In the eyes of dialectical philosophy, nothing is established for all
>time, nothing is absolute or sacred. On everything and in everything
>it sees the stamp of inevitable decline; nothing can resist it save
>the unceasing process of formation and destruction, the unending
>ascent from lower to the higher -- a process of which philosophy
>itself is only a simple reflection within the thinking brain.

On Thursday, I had given free rein to my first self -- Arne(1) -- who like all Johns(1) or H%onse(1) feels **very** superior because of insights they gain, sitting on the shoulder of the eagle, or, to use the more recent Nordic image, traveling as a rider of the big mother goose, as a Nils(1), son of Holger.

We know it better than Engels because we have the additional experience. We do not look down to religion as a "primitive form of the spirit" anymore, rather we see it as one of the "enemy sisters" -- as the wonderful genre goes that C. West Churchman has used in his Alterswerk (wise age work) "The Systems Approach and Its Enemies". The Greeks might have invented it, or the even older philosophers in India or China ? Science is one of the sisters, big industry another, the state institutions a whole gang/group/team of them. Tank-Girls, these days, it seems.

And, of course, as contradictions go, the supreme irony of this quote of Engels if you just turn it against the official high priests of the Marx and Engels secular belief system. The "eternal" party hierarchy, the fixed ideas about what constitutes the right way to ensure reproduction of a society, all these things that were still going on 25 years ago just some 50 kilometers east of here...

I imagine that (e.g.) Peter Ruben, a professional philosopher in the German Democratic Republic, must have drawn much of his immense energy of criticizing his own community and their politics from quotes like this one. Three times he was sent "into production" to drive caterpillars or assemble appliances, and came back, grateful for the new experiences, and with arguments so much stronger. I wish someone out there would just take the volume "Dialektik und Arbeit der Philosophie", and translate it into English. Or has it been done already ?

For Ruben, philosophy must be defined as "Allgemeine Arbeit", "generalisation work", a very simple and powerful idea. He also has established a very important

distinction between "Widerstreit" and "Widerspruch", literally: fight-against and speak-against, or: counter-conflict and contra-diction.

The first is a typical one-time encounter of two independent, autonomous systems -- like when a meteor hits mother earth either hard or by just scratching her gaseous outskirts. For both systems this encounter surely has grave consequences, among them good ones -- like apparently our marsupial and mammal ancestors finding a big open, albeit dusty, sphere to spread and invent their endless varieties...

For one of the both systems or even both at once, the Widerstreit might end with obliteration, systems' death. But they might also just part again, each on its own autonomous course. The important characteristics is the lack of *common* consequences of a sort of one-time-event of counter-action.

The second, the contradiction in the Marxian/Hegelian sense, is much more interesting, because both systems (sometimes also more than just the perennial *two*) not only survive the encounter, they also continue to "struggle" against one another, thereby essentially making up their own autonomous meta-system, driven by the endless (oh, no, not really "endless", all sorts of ends and pauses do occur) counter- forces. As example, see the developing world markets, of goods, of labour, of happiness...

But then, really: Colleagues and Countrymen: Isn't this a wisdom of nearly everybody today ? Look at the second quote (about three pages into section V of the article) from Engels "L.F. and the way out of classical German Philosophy", once again:

>The great basic idea that the world is not to be viewed as a complex
>of fully fashioned objects, but as a complex of processes, in
>which apparently stable objects, no less than the images of them inside
>our heads (our concepts), are undergoing incessant changes ...

Engels continues (my translation):

>incessant changes, in which in spite of all apparent randomness, and
>against all momentaneous backdropping tendencies, in the long run a
>progressive development is making itself felt -- this great basic
>idea has, especially since Hegel, been so thoroughly absorbed by the
>common sense, that it will probably find no contradiction anymore. But
>to acknowledge the idea in the phrase, and to apply it in the reality,
>concretely and on every field of enquiry, these are two different
>things altogether.

This is really worth citing, even today.

However, I remain stubborn as regards the serious flaw in Engels and also Marx's theory of the subjective -- of which the Cartesian split into reality and its reflection "in our brains" is only the most conspicuous symptom. Their category system did not really encompass cultures in our sense today. The category of "the ideal", together with its contradictive partner, "the material" **must** be transformed into a better understanding of public mind, et cetera.

Along the lines that Jay is so diligently drawing up for a couple of years now for us--all, yes, Vera, I agree.

Wishing you a bright Sunday: Arne.

24.16. Date: Sun, 12 May 1996 18:45:45 EDT

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>
Subject: Re: Dialectics (In praise of Engels)
To: X-MCA Discussion List Group <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Michael Glassman makes a provocative case, *_sensu stricto_*, regarding dialectics and developmental theory.

At the end, he points to Vygotsky's own triple dialectics, of individual ontogenesis, of historical change and contingency, and of biological evolution in nature as foregrounding the differences between developmental agendas and those of philosophical dialectics, or dialectics applies to these other aspects or levels.

What I think we may understand today better than in Engels' day, or in Vygotsky's, is the close interdependence of these three sorts of dialectics or dynamics. Their former clear separability has now blurred for us and been replaced by new concepts and units of analysis in which the biological-natural and social-cultural are not so distinct any more, and in which evolution and development are intimately integrated, and in which the different time scales of ontogenesis, historical change, and ecological evolution help rather than hinder formation of an integrated theory. We do not yet have such a fully integrated theory, but I think it is now within our grasp, and that most of the bits and pieces are around somewhere, if only in sketchy forms.

Perhaps Michael G. is right that a purely philosophical approach to dialectics is not enough, and may even tend to misdirect us. We need I think a very material view of dialectics, or at least one which does not oppose the dialectics of self-organization in material systems to the dialectics of cultural change mediated by symbolic resources for meaning (i.e. for meaningful behavior, which is always also material in its medium and effects). We need ways of conceptualizing such systems that

would let them teach us dialectics even if we had never had a philosophical preview of it. This, too, I think is beginning today to happen.

One of the most radical readings of Michael's arguments would be that psychology as a discipline, if we want to make dialectics its basis, must relinquish even more than it already has the claims to autonomy inherent in its guiding questions and key concepts. But then so must sociology, cultural anthropology, and maybe history (a different principle of definition, I think). There is just one science here, not many. Perhaps a big problem in this century has been that the long-standing strategy of success in the physical sciences and part of biology (to specialize) doesn't work for our issues, that we must learn instead to synthesize (which is much harder, perhaps requiring collaborative research efforts on larger scales and longer periods of time and continuity). It's all too obvious how our institutional arrangements work against this. Eppur si muove! [Nonetheless, it does move -- Galileo.] JAY.

JAY LEMKE.

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24.17. Date: Tue, 14 May 1996 12:08:20 +0200

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)
Subject: Re: Dialectics and CHAT
To: xmca <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Dialectics and CHAT in the cultureal process, or ways from nominalist Dialectics to realist Dialogics

Dear Arne, Jay, Vera and Michael,

with a mixture of fascination and bewilderment I have read the exchanges among you on one of the great attempts to implement seriously the evolutive into our world view.

When Arne looks back at those Hegelian proposals and their Marx-Engelian twists and 20th century perversions I understand quite well that he wanted most to have them placed in the historical archive if it were not for their proven power. They indeed destroyed many a life, though they also opened many an eye. Yet, nevertheless, more rewarding I find looking at them as a part of a larger and possibly more fertile tradition to introduce a non-Platonic and non-Cartesian evolutive world view and image of humans. I won't dwell now on Herder whom I find

crucial in this tradition. But indeed, in some way these figures from Hegel to Lenin & Co. are hybrids of Herderian realist evolutionism and (post-)Kantian idealist essentialism or absolutism in matters of change.

I propose to at the same time return to the roots of the dialectic movement and to pursue a realist perspective: why not systematically replace the idea of Dialactics, i.e. of opposing ideas jumping into a new third, by Dialogics, i.e. the process of two related though different things giving birth to a third, also related or affine to the two (as in gametic procreation)? In a general notion of Dialogue, some structure (not exclusively a logon, a word, but something of sign character in general) is taken up by a second structure and thereby a third structure is generated that usually carries on characters of both of its precursors. This is the small enough step of bringing about something new that in suitable recursions produces the systematic changes we call open endedly evolutive whether it be in ontogenesis of memory endowed individual organisms, in the phylogenetic near replications of generic organisms in suitable environments, or in cultural change of groups of complex individuals in their common and self-created situations. Dialogue is the medium of the cultural process par excellence, much more than the somehow fictitious revulsion or revolutions dreamt of when one wants to change the ideal good for the real bad in fundamental turns which usually turns out to soon become more of the same.

Alfred

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25. Zeigarnik 1996: 5 / 22

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25.1. Date: Wed, 7 Aug 1996 22:32:46 -0400

From: "Ana M. Shane" <pshane@andromeda.rutgers.edu>
Subject: Re: Lewin meeting
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Mike, and others who have responded to the UCLA Lewin Conference Program,

thanks for the interest. Lewin's ideas seem to me very very relevant for CHAT - because he was stressing the situatedness of the individual and interaction between person and her/his socio-cultural environment in a particular historical point in time. It is also known today that Lewin was acquainted with the Moscow group: Vygotsky, Luria, Davidov and others and that they had very lively discussions on several occasions. Lewin even visited Moscow in 1933 and stayed at Vygotsky's home for several weeks. Vygotsky gave a very detailed critique of Lewin's ideas in his "Language and Thought"...

I can't answer the question about putting together a special issue of Mind, Culture and Activity just now. I would like to consult with the two other co-chairs of the program committee: Albert Pepitone and Robert Kleiner. I do think, however, that it would be a very interesting task and that some aspects of the Field Theory fill in some gaps in CHAT.

Ana

25.2. Date: Wed, 28 Aug 1996 17:07:05 -0400

From: "Ana M. Shane" <pshane@andromeda.rutgers.edu>
Subject: Does anyone know...?
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Dear xmca-ers,

Does anyone know (and can give appropriate resources) whether L.S.Vygotsky spoke (and read and/or wrote) German? A friend of mine, Dr. Robert J. Kleiner is writing a paper on the relationship between Vygotsky and K. Lewin and we know so far that in Spring 1933 Lewin spent about 2 - 3 weeks in Moscow and stayed at Vygotsky's home, where they had lively discussions (accompanied by Luria and others). We also know that there are numerous references of German texts

supplied to Vygotsky's collected works (but mostly by the editors). So we think that he indeed spoke German, but we are not sure. Is there a way to know?

Ana

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25.3. Date: Wed, 28 Aug 1996 15:04:59 -0700

From: Eugene Matusov <ematusov@cats.ucsc.edu>
Subject: Re: Does anyone know...?
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Hello Ana and everybody--

It seems to me that I read in van der Veer, R., & Valsiner, J. (1991). <bigger>Understanding Vygotsky: A quest for synthesis<underline> that </underline></bigger>Vygotsky spoke German. However, he preferred to speak through his translator when he met German colleagues probably because he was embarrassed of his Russian accent. Besides he probably spoke Yiddish which is very similar to German.

Eugene Matusov

25.4. Date: Wed, 28 Aug 96 19:28:04 -0500

From: Peter Smagorinsky <psmagorinsky@ou.edu>
Subject: Re: Does anyone know...?
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

If anyone's in contact with Gita Vygotskaya (v's daughter--I think that's the right spelling) we could probably answer this one...

NOTE MY NEW EMAIL ADDRESS!!!

Peter Smagorinsky
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Department of Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum
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psmagorinsky@ou.edu

25.5. Date: Fri, 30 Aug 1996 00:48:22 -0400

From: "Ana M. Shane" <pshane@andromeda.rutgers.edu>
Subject: Re: Does anyone know...?
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Thanks Peter!

However, I spoke to Gita and she remembers her father having lively discussions in what she said was a foreign language for her. but was it Yiddish or German she could not tell.

Ana

25.6. Date: Fri, 30 Aug 1996 10:20:34 -0400

From: BGindis@aol.com
Subject: Re: Does anyone know...?
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Dear Ana, according to Gita (see: "Rememberin Father" special edition of Educational Psychologist, Vol. 30, #2, Spring 1995, pp. 57-59) ..."The coversation (between Vygotsky and Levin - BG) was in German" p. 57. In her opening address in Dundee (June of 1995, Vygotsky's Theme Day during the 16 ISPA Colloquium), Gita listed the German language among languages L.S. had mastered in his childhood. In her another memoir (see: "His life" special edition of School Psychology International, Vol. 16, #2, pp. 105-116) she wrote about the German language spoken by his parents and German literature (poetry) appreciated by the family. IN personal communication on several occasions she mentioned German as the "second language" for L.S. I think that takes care of Gita's testimonies. There are numerous other evidences in literature (I do not have them at hand, sorry) that V. was able to speak and read German.

Boris Ginds.

25.7. Date: Fri, 30 Aug 1996 19:26:25 -0600 (MDT)

From: vera p john-steiner <vygotsky@unm.edu>
Subject: Re: Does anyone know...?
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Ana,

Could you ask Vygotsky's daughter?

Vera

Vera P. John-Steiner
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25.8. Date: Sat, 31 Aug 1996 00:47:15 -0400

From: "Ana M. Shane" <pshane@andromeda.rutgers.edu>
Subject: Re: Does anyone know...?
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Vera,

I did! I Asked Gita Vygotskaya about her father's knowledge of German. (see my previous posting) But she can't tell whether what her father spoke to Lewin was German or Yiddish. We can assume he read in German, maybe even spoke in German, but we are not sure.

Why is that important?

Well, the picture which emerges about Lewin and Vygotsky connection is rather interesting. It was a dynamic relationship over quite number of years. One can see changes in each of their theories over time, which look like a dialogue.

On the other hand it would be interesting to know whether Yiddish was a language developed in that area to handle all the sophisticated theoretical concepts they used. (I think it was, but it is just a hunch - and so far nothing we know was written in Yiddish by them!!!)

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25.9. Date: Sat, 31 Aug 1996 00:57:04 -0400

From: "Ana M. Shane" <pshane@andromeda.rutgers.edu>
Subject: Re: Does anyone know...?
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Dear Boris,

THANK you so much. This answers many questions. Thank you for the references, too.

Ana

25.10. Date: Sat, 31 Aug 1996 08:26:02 +0100

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)
Subject: Re: Does anyone know...?
To: xmca <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Dear Ana, Vera, Boris and others,

in order to better understand the exchanges between Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical thinking and Lewinian Gestalt- and Field-Theory it would, in addition to their personal relation, also be important to know more about the role and activities over a longer period of Bluma Zeigarnik in the Moscow circle. She had studied with Lewin in Berlin in the twenties and worked in Moscow until her death in the eighties and also written and published about this relationship (I don't have documents at hand). Could anybody elaborate on this?

Alfred

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25.11. Date: Sat, 31 Aug 1996 11:01:38 -0400

From: BGindis@aol.com
Subject: Re: Does anyone know...?
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Dear Alfred, in the late 80 (during perestroika") a well-known historian of psychology in the former Soviet Union, Michael Yaroshevsky published an interview with Bluma Volfovna Zeigarnick. This interview was later translated into English and published in the periodical "Soviet Psychology" (edited by Michael Cole). I do not have it at hand and cannot give you the exact data (I read this interview in Russian, anyway). In this interview Bluma discussed her personal experiences with both Lewin and Vygogtsky. You are right: she was the unique link between those two giants of modern psychology. This interview is a wealth of information for everyone interested in their (V. & L.) relationships. Boris Gindis

25.12. Date: Sat, 31 Aug 96 14:36:46 -0500

From: Peter Smagorinsky <psmagorinsky@ou.edu>
Subject: Re: Does anyone know...?
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Boris's message prompted me to reach for my copy of Yaroshevsky's *Lev Vygotsky* (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1989) where I found that Lewin says "Although I had person contacts with Vygotsky during two weeks only, he left an indelible impression on me" (p. 26). According to Yaroshevsky Vygotsky had "very friendly relations with Kurt Lewin, but he nevertheless sharply criticised Lewin's interpretation of the connection between affect and intellect after their face-to-face discussions of these problems" (pp. 26-7). This meeting took place when Lewin stopped in Moscow while returning to Germany from a lecture tour in China. In this account there's no mention of Bluma Volfovna Zeigarnick. Yaroshevsky later says that Vygotsky engaged in "acute polemics" with Lewin along with Thorndike, Kohler, Freud, Piaget, and Buhler (much of this in *Thinking and Speech*).

I've recommended this splendid volume in the past, and do so again. I'm not sure how to buy a copy in the US.

Peter

NOTE MY NEW EMAIL ADDRESS!!!

25.14. Date: Tue, 3 Sep 1996 21:47:44 -0400

From: BGindis@aol.com
Subject: Re: Does anyone know...?
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Dear Ana, Alfred, Peter and others interested in this matter.

In the context of the relationships between V.'s and L.'s theoretical paradigms, we are talking about the role Zeigarnick might have played. Let me share with you what I know about this matter. My argument is that while Bluma was instrumental in organizing personal contacts between L. and V., she had not contributed anything substantial into scientific connections or even discussions between their theories.

B. V. Zeigarnick is one of the first and, probably, the most prominent of Lewin's students. She has secured her place in the history of psychology at a very early age by brilliantly describing (after many series of pretty experiments) the phenomenon which bears her name since then: "Zeigarnic effect" ("the interrupted action is remembered better than "completed" action") It was first published in "Psychologische Forschung" in 1927.

This discovery and its description (the terms used, the concept itself, the way the experiments were designed and carried out, etc.) perfectly fits the gestalt paradigm in general and Lewin's "field theory" in particular. In 1929 Bluma returned to Russia. She worked in a psychiatric clinic until WWII. According to Gita, Bluma brought Lewin to Vygotsky's flat at Serpuhkovsky, 17, in 1933. Bluma, as well as A. R. Luria, participated in their discussions. We probably will never know what they discussed. But one thing is known. According to Bluma (see the interview I mentioned earlier) Lewin asked Vygotsky's advice where to emigrate (it was 1933, Hitler had seized the power in Germany). We do not know what advice V. gave to Lewin. But we do know that L. emigrated to the US. (thank God).

Zeigarnick became one of the most prominent psychologists in the former Soviet Union: she is the "founding mother" of contemporary psychopathology in the former USSR. She is the author and co-author of practically all major textbooks on psychopathology ("abnormal psychology" in the US terms) and was the leading teacher in this area (full professor at Moscow University since early 60s (in Luria's department). Her last book, the second edition of "Psychopathology" was published in 1986 (after her death).

Now, I attended her lectures in 1973-76. I read from cover to cover many of her textbooks during my training as a forensic psychologist. I can testify that in all her texts she appeared as an orthodox Vygotskian (in Leontiev's modification) and there is nothing there from gestalt psychology in general and Lewin's writings in particular. During her lectures she was very critical of Lewin, I would say, even sarcastic: she repeatedly said: "the so-called theory of Lewin". Among her books there is one titled: "Theory of Personality of Kurt Lewin", published by MGU in 1981.

(in Russian: "Teoria Lichnosti K. Levina"). I believe this text is critical in understanding the whole issue. Here, again, there is a sharp criticism of L.'s ideas from Vygotskian's position. (Please note: I am not an expert in this question, that is my personal perception. I should re-read this book, it is on my shelf collecting dust). That is why I think that in the scientific/theoretical perspective Bluma is not the "bridge" between L. and W, although from a personal perspective she undoubtedly had been.

P.S., Ana, I do not have at hand the exact data where this interview was published in English, it is one of those "Soviet Psychology" journals of translations.

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25.15. Date: Wed, 4 Sep 1996 01:53:39 -0400

From: "Ana M. Shane" <pshane@andromeda.rutgers.edu>

Subject: Re: Does anyone know...?

To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Dear Boris,

This is a fascinating story! One wonders why did Bluma Zeigarnic became not just critical of Lewin's theory but more than that: sarcastic!

Thanks for sharing it.

Ana

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25.16. Date: Wed, 4 Sep 1996 14:19:40 +0100

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)
Subject: Re: Does anyone know...? Lewin-Vygotsky-Zeigarnik
To: xmca <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

My best thanks, Boris, for your very informative account of Bluma Zeigarnik's probable role in the Lewin-Vygotsky relationship. It all sounds plausible to me in respect to the fact, that she did not remain an important force in the ongoing developments of Lewinian theory, not even in the research tradition of the Zeigarnik effect while being an important scientist on her own. In the meantime, I could reread the (translated and "slightly shortened") interview by M.G. Jaroschewskij (the German transliteration) published in *Psychologische Rundschau* (the German equivalent of *American Psychologist*) 40(2) 1989 104-110. It appears that passages critical of Lewin's theory, if they existed at all, have been left out. Z. is very positive on Lewin's emphasis of the person as the central problem of psychology - this, she emphasizes, in relative contrast to the rest of Gestalt psychology and most factions of experimental psychology, except, of course, of Goldstein. But in view of her interests and career, the passages on Goldstein are also strangle short and general.

As to the relation Lewin-Vygotsky, she says that Lewin estimated Vygotsky highly. On the views of Vygotsky on Lewin she says only that he judged Lewin's research critically and did a series of experimental studies with the aim of detecting weak points in Lewin's conception. Might that perhaps cover her own critical attitude? About her own relation to Lewin, she says, that her Berlin years clearly had an influence on her later work but does not specify it in any way. We obviously have to read that type of meta-information very carefully and certainly relate it to and correct it with the actual scientific work of those involved.

Mention is made of a volume of contributions to commemorate Vygotsky in 1936. Maybe it was not published then or later. (I have never seen reference to it.) Or has it? Lewin is said to have sent in a contribution. What might that be? From my own Lewin bibliography (in the 1963 German translation of the *Field Theory* volume) and the further addition based on the *Collected work* edition by Grauman I am unable to clearly identify this contribution. One candidate is an item of these years in Lewin's *Nachlass* entitled "Feldtheorie und Geometrie" scheduled to be published in volume 3 of the *collected works* (with uncertain delay). Since Zeigarnik says in the interview Lewin was more interested in geometry (compared to

Koehlers interest in physics) she might have had that paper in mind. Boris -- or anybody else -- do you know of this Vygotsky commemorative volume? Has it been published? Are there traces anywhere of Lewin's contribution to such a volume?

My special interest in the L-V-relation is on two levels: (a) psychological theorizing intending explicitly some larger system than the individual (ecological, cultural, historical etc.) and (b) theory of science. As to the latter, I believe that Lewin was one of the most original philosophers of science ever, comparable in insights and originality to geniuses like Peirce and Wittgenstein and in essence more interesting than the most hailed Bridgman, Popper or Kuhn etc. He was barely received as such and, unfortunately, has neglected that side of his work in his American years which had taken practically half of his efforts in the Berlin years. Lewin is one of the very few philosophers of science who also were active scientists, theoretical and empirical researchers. Now Vygotsky, on the other hand, was certainly highly interested in the foundations of a better psychological science of which we have traces spread all over his accessible work yet lack a more systematic synthesis.

Alfred

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25.17. Date: Wed, 4 Sep 1996 10:25:29 -0400

From: "Ana M. Shane" <pshane@andromeda.rutgers.edu>
Subject: Re: Does anyone know...? Lewin-Vygotsky-Zeigarnik
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Dear Alfred, Boris, and others

The story of Lewin-Vygotsky (Zeigarnik and possibly others) interaction is becoming more and more interesting. There are at least two levels in which I am interested in it: the development of their philosophical and psychological (sociological) models and their interaction, as well as the dynamic of that interaction and changes over time. It seems clear that both of them knew of each other's theorizing to some extent, very early on. When did it happen? When B. Zeigarnik went to Berlin? Did she first bring the news of Vygotsky to Lewin, or the other way around?

Second, we know of Vygotsky's references and criticism of Lewin's theory, but do we know about Lewin's side of the dialogue? Did Lewin ever mention Vygotsky (or

Moscow school) in his writings? What did he think about them? and when did he think that?

For instance - the place of the symbolic function - semiotic tools - in the cognitive development: did Lewin pay attention to that significant aspect of Vygotsky's theory and what did he make out of it?

Or, it seems that Vygotsky's critique of Lewin's "a-historic" position made an impact on Lewin and he later refined his notion of time and the role of the past in the moment to moment cross-section of the life space. But I didn't see an explicit reference to Vygotsky. (Of course, I haven't read all there is to read by Lewin, either, so I may be wrong). But it would be interesting to know how their relationship started and to follow its subsequent development.

Thank you for the most interesting stories and facts.

Ana

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The 7th International Kurt Lewin Conference on the Web

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/2253/confprg.html>

25.18. Date: Wed, 04 Sep 96 23:17:37 EDT

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>
Subject: Lewin, Vygotsky, et al.
To: X-MCA Discussion List Group <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

In particular response to the recent message from Alfred Lang, I would be curious to know more about the distinctive tone of Lewin's views on the nature of scientific practices and products.

JAY.

JAY LEMKE.

City University of New York.

BITNET: JLLBC@CUNYVM

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25.19. Date: Sat, 07 Sep 96 16:07:42 EDT

From: Jay Lemke <JLLBC@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>

Subject: Lewin, Vygotsky, et al.

To: X-MCA Discussion List Group <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Serendipity strikes again. Hunting a reference in Bruner's Acts of Meaning, I noticed fn 36, p.169 on Lewin, Vygotsky, Zeigarnik.

Don't know if this has already been noted as I rejoined in the midst of things.

Bruner discusses Lewin v. Vygotsky briefly and cites a source: Guillermo Blanck Vygotsky, Buenos Aires (in preparation), a manuscript and communication from the author, about Zeigarnik and all this business. The date was given as October 1989.

Has the work of G. Blanck appeared? is it known to people on the list? JAY.

JAY LEMKE.

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25.20. Date: Sat, 7 Sep 1996 18:38:50 -0400

From: BGindis@aol.com

Subject: Re: Lewin, Vygotsky, et al.

To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Jay,

Guillermo Blank is the author of "vygotsky: The Man and His Cause" (pp. 34-58) published in L. Moll (ed.) (1989) "Vygotsky and Education" Cambridge U. Press. It is one of the best biographical sketches of V.'s life I have ever seen. I am not sure, I saw once reference on Dr. Blank's book "Vygotsky" in Spanish (but it could be an article as well).

I know for sure that Blank met with Zeigarnick personally and he met many times with Gita in 1979-81.

On page 43, Blank wrote about the historic meeting between L. and V.: "Of all the great encounters in the field of psychology, this was one that Bruner (conversation,

May 7, 1987) always imagined and would not have missed for anything in the world" Boris



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25.21. Date: Mon, 9 Sep 1996 08:57:19 +0100

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)
Subject: Re: Does anyone know...? Lewin-Vygotsky-Zeigarnik
To: xmca <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Sorry, this message of Friday was not forwarded by our university computer because it missed the date field which was not filled by my Mac because I had to reset PRAM and forgot to reset the Map control field - I send it again:

Ana, Jay, et al.

It is to exclude that Zeigarnik knew of Lewin (and of Vygotsky as a psychologist) before she went to Berlin in 1924. In the interview she describes that her studies' course was quite accidental. She was interested in psychological things more in the form of literature, but was disappointed of the philologists of the time, and then came across and was fascinated by the lectures of Wertheimer and Lewin and perhaps even more of his group and his personality. On the other hand, Vygotsky certainly knew in the later twenties of the Berlin Gestalt group from his extended readings, e.g. in connection with the "crisis" of psychology.

I know of few mentions of Vygotsky in Lewin's works and only casually in passing something specific; but so he deals with several of his probably major sources of influence, with the exception of Cassirer, so with Simmel or with Mach).

In the 1941 "Field theory of learning" (in the resume at the end) he mentions Vygo slightly critically (and a bit cryptically) among others who tend to use too simple classifications in matters organizing forces within the cognitive structure.

Also in 1941 in "Regression, retrogression and development" with Barker and Dembo he mentions Vygo's Thinking and Speaking together with Geld & Goldstein in reference to abstract and concrete thought

In the 1946 overall summary of his theorizing "Behavior and development as a function of the total situation" (also reprinted in the 1951 Cartwright volume "Field Theory") he refers to Vygo's Thinking and Speaking in connection with substitute activities (Ersatzwert und Erkennen).

I need to look up some of the earlier writings; but Vygotsky is certainly not as fully present in Lewin's writings as you would expect from so much common interests.

By the way, Zeigarnik appears to have written on Lewin in the Great Soviet Pedagogical Encyclopedia, e.g. in the 1965 edition in vol. 2, pp. 597-98, and in what seems to be a monograph: *Teoria licnosti Kurta Lewina*. Moscow 1981, University-Publishers, both of which I do not know, cannot read. The references are from Alexander Metraux in the introduction to his 2 volume edition of L.'s philosophy of science writings, Bern/Stuttgart, Huber/Klett-Cotta, 1981 + 1983.

Vygotsky's criticism of Lewin's "a-historic" position is based on a widely colportated misunderstanding. Lewin might actually well be perhaps the most consequentially historical of all psychologists, as he explains in his 1943 "Defining the field at a given time". I cannot see this as a revision of Lewin's position, rather as an explication of what is at the base of Lewin's psychological thinking from the late 1910s which is based on the notion of genetic series. I shall explain this a bit in another message to Jay's suggestion as soon as I find the time which might be only after the Geneva conference.

As to "semiotic tools" and the symbolic function I feel that Lewin never explicitly used semiotic terminology and his notion of a sign process is very implicit if at all. He appears to even avoid terms like "symbol". Perhaps, this is one of his major and very consequential neglects in that the field theory obviously uses an equivalent notion and the fundamental notion of genetic series indeed requires a "medium" including but going beyond physical causality. Lewin is basically a (Neo-)Kantian with usual 20th century pseudo materialistic touch (as is with Vygotsky) of the common "natural" science paradigm. This is hard to understand in view of the early influence of Cassirer and the fact that Lewin wrote a highly admiring commemorative article on Cassirer that has been published in 1949 by Schilpp (*The philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*). Lewin appears to have not followed Cassirer's developments after the 1910 "Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff" when Cassirer, while also keeping that Kantian background, took a (dualistic) semiotic path in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Form*.

Alfred

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Switzerland

25.22. Date: Mon, 9 Sep 1996 16:41:44 +0100

From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)
Subject: Re: Does anyone know...? Lewin-Vygotsky-Zeigarnik
To: xmca <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu> CC: rklei26436 <rklei26436@aol.com>

Here an additional information based on a contact with Alexander Metraux, the editor of Lewin's philosophy of science works who best knows Lewin's Nachlass. He is certain, based on correspondence between Lewin und Luria (there are no letters of Vygotsky to Lewin left) that Lewin never has written or sent that article for the Vygo commemorative volume which, as Boris Grindis confirms in a private message has never been published anyway.

Publication of stuff on the Lewin-Vygotsky-Luria relation commented by Metraux is foreseen for next year.

Alfred

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26. Arne 1996: 2 / 7

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26.1. Date: Mon, 2 Dec 1996 12:59:17 +0100

From: Christoph Clases <clases@rrz.uni-hamburg.de>
Subject: Sad News from Hamburg
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

As I always had the impression that most of you appreciated his voice and as I know that for some of you he was really more than 'someone out there' ...

In the early morning of last Sunday Arne Raeithel has gone away for ever.

Writing this down I have not even realized his unexpected death.

He left a lot to make us think and I am thinking of him.

Christoph

26.2. Date: Mon, 2 Dec 1996 07:51:31 -0800 (PST)

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>
Subject: Losing Arne
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Dear Christoph,

I feel as if part of me died with your note about Arne's death. He was one of the original members of this discussion whose voice we have heard too seldom in recent years because he could not obtain an academic position that would allow him our liesure to explore ideas and play with new practices-- he had to take the methods he developed into the business world to stay afloat. And now his living voice is stilled. I have been missing him, but felt secure that he was only a "return" away. A further reminder of the ephemeral nature of all such feelings.

Arne was also a contributor to the first issue of MCA and a member of the editorial board. For many years I have been urging him to write an article summarizing his ideas on coordination, communication, and cognition for an English audience, but to no avail. I last heard him speak about this topic at a conference held here over a

year ago in which he elaborated on Yrjo Engestrom's elaboration of his ideas. I wonder if some one(s) of the XMCA community who know Arne's work and read/write German might take up that task.

I personally promise to pay for the translation of such an article, whatever its length. If others on XMCA are sympathetic to this idea, they might join me in creating a small fund for the translation of Arne's work so that his cultural voice can continue to grow even as he leaves us. MCA seems a fitting forum.

Very sadly,

mike

26.3. Date: Wed, 4 Dec 1996 08:58:51 -0800 (PST)

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>
Subject: remembering Arne
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Dear Colleagues,

I go into a long day of teaching and bureuacrating in a few minutes, but I wanted to pass along some information and some thoughts about remembering Arne.

I feel as if I have been participating in a new form of memorial service, one which comes through print and add off times of the day mixed with other work, what we call local concerns. Bu when/where is local? So I find myself moved to tears between reading a student paper and having a colleague drop in to talk, or to answer the phone. The discussion of about community took on a new hew.

Thanks to so many for their thoughts.

Practically, we here at LCHC are doing the following:

- 1) We are trying to retrieve all of Arne's contributions to XLCHC and XMCA.
- 2) We are hoping that we can find the paper Arne gave here at a work conference last year and put it together with some of his earlier writing in German. we need help identifying that work!
- 3) We will devoted an entire issue of MCA to what we come up with.

I know that Arne's German colleagues have memorial plans. I do not know what they are. If someone can help us to help them, please do so.

Of to be a professor.

mike

26.4. Date: Thu, 5 Dec 1996 08:34:24 +0100

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)
Subject: Arne
To: xmca <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Dear CMCA-friends,

it was so shocking for me to learn of Arne's sudden passing away, it paralysed me the full day and I am still unable to find a way to express my feelings and to find a form of tribute and memory of that short and repeatedly intense friendship. It was by detour of XLCHC, the former XMCA, and Mike subtle coaching, that we knew each other. I shall try again later when back from a symposium commemorating the 80th birthday of another good friend and colleague. I then also will try to get in contact with his more immediate German colleagues and contribute what I can to a decent way of making his best contributions to cultural psychology remaining with us.

In the meantime it is so helpful to see numbers of XMCA colleagues expressing their bereavement and their longtime enrichment through Arne's so often original and thoughtful and fruitbearing contributions to our community of worldwide distributed mind.

Yours, Alfred

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26.5. Date: Sat, 7 Dec 1996 06:53:20 -0800 (PST)

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>
Subject: arne: questions
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Dear Judy and Others,

As I understand it from a message from Cristoph, Arne died of a stroke that hit him while sitting at his computer. I am sorry I know so little. When they have a chance, I assume our German colleagues will take the lead in informing the international community appropriately.

mike

26.6. Date: Thu, 12 Dec 1996 16:41:24 +0100

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From: Alfred Lang <lang@psy.unibe.ch>
Subject: Arne's funeral is today
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Dear friends,

also ten days after the event it is hard to understand that we never will have again Arne's creative spirit among us and those dialogues and multilogues, in writing and late into the nights sitting together, and following crazy threads of ideas. Sometimes his phantasies were difficult to follow, sometimes he was stuck with some idea so dear to him and tried to see everything in the light of it, so he could not follow other's speculations. Sometimes it was a light that would not hold, sometimes it grew and enlightened some riddle, sometimes just for the night, sometimes it held for days and weeks and longer. When it came to Feuerbach he was probably most exciting. Mach turned him on as well, and his idea of science, no matter whether we spoke of Empfingungen or Mach's hen. With Peirce it was particularly fascinating to discuss with him and I never forget our competition in mutually improving each one's other's diagrams for semiosis. He had an "almost theoretical instinct" (Herder) for understanding practice and a gift for bringing some of it into communicating.

Today ist the day of his obsequies in Hamburg. It will be good to have some memorial of his in the form of a selection of his papers and unfinished ideas. I strive to keep an cultivate some of his freshness in scientific discourse.

Yours, Alfred

Alfred Lang, Psychology, Univ. Bern, Switzerland --- lang@psy.unibe.ch

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26.7. Date: Mon, 16 Dec 1996 14:07:46 +0100

From: Christoph Clases <clases@rrz.uni-hamburg.de>
Subject: Re: honoring Arne
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Dear Mike and others,

to put it in these medical terms, Arne died because of a sudden brain haemorrhage.No one can not tell exactly how this happened, but the doctors told

his wife that he had a congenital weakness of his blood-vessels. He must immediately have lost consciousness and probably didn't have to suffer.

On last Thursday there has been a memorial ceremony for Arne in Hamburg. About seventy to eighty colleagues and friends came from all over Germany expressing their grief and respect. For me it became once again very clear in which many ways Arne has been of a very special importance for so many different people.

After the ceremony a group of close colleagues and friends decided to have a further meeting in order to discuss about the ways we can actively keep Arnes voices alive. The initial idea is to publish his works in a dialogical form, i.e. to try to answer to Arnes texts by revealing the significance of his thinking for different fields of research.

This will surely take some time, because there are existing many (in the best sense) fragmentary texts of Arne. We established a mailing list and will surely inform the xmca-community about the ongoing state of affairs.

In Zuerich, Switzerland, there will be a conference workshop (7. Zuericher Symposion Arbeitspsychologie, 23.-26. March 97) dealing with Arnes contributions to the psychology of work: 'On activity, work and practice'.

Concerning the coordination of activities I personally would not like to decide on a central coordination position. The networks should be free to develop and communicate their own ideas.

There should be enough people interested in maintaing the links between the networks and I am prepared to contribute to this.

I do very much appreciate the web page established by Eva in Sweden. Itt seems to be a very promising way of distributing the multi-voicedness of Arnes thinking in and between communities of practice.

So far from Germany. I apologize for being a bit late with this.

Regards,

Christoph

27. Boesch 1996: 2 / 3

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27.1. Date: Thu, 5 Dec 1996 08:34:10 -0800 (PST)

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>
Subject: Greetings To Ernst Boesch!
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Dear Alfred-- Extend our warmest greetings to Ernst on his 80th birthday! His article, "The sound of the violin" is one of the most beautiful exercises in the application of cultural-historical activity theory to aesthetic experience. May he live many years and continue to inspire us in the future as he has in the past!

mike

27.2. Date: Tue, 10 Dec 1996 09:41:06 +0100

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From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)
Subject: Re: Ernst Boesch! (reference)
To: xmca <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Stephanie,

here's the reference of that wonderful article:

Boesch, Ernst E. (1993) The sound of the violin. Schweizerische Zeitschrift f,r Psychologie 52 (2) 70-81 (Reprinted in: Quarterly Newsletter of the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition (UCSD) 15 (1) 1993).

Boesch will be 80 on December 26. Best greetings, Alfred

>Could you please post the full reference for "The Sound of the Violin?"

>Many thanks.

>Stephanie

>

>Stephanie Urso Spina

>City University of New York

Alfred Lang

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27.3. Date: Wed, 8 Jan 1997 09:03:56 +0100

From: Alfred Lang <lang@psy.unibe.ch>
Subject: Ernst E. Boesch to his 80th Birthday
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Dear friends of the XMCA community,

the following is from an article which appeared in the weekend cultural section of the Bernese Newspaper "Der Bund" on December 21st, 1996. Boesch has become 80 on the 26th of December. I am a bit late in distributing this English version of a major section of the text due to an awful flu. But I thought this might interest some members of the XMCA community. If there is further interest I could add to the to the present nutshell summary of his thinking also the section giving the essentials of his scientific biography. The last of the following paragraphs summarizes thoughts not explicitly found in Boesch's published work; it is based on personal exchange and Boesch made it a key part of his short address at the end of the symposium organized in his honor on December 6th, 1996, at the Max-Planck-Institute in Berlin. An account of this event will appear in due time in Culture & Psychology.

AL

Ernst E. Boesch -- Initiator of Another Psychology -----

With subtle and cognizant research and an impressive theory Boesch has stubbornly worked from the 1960s on towards giving a befitting place within psychology to the culturality of humans. He has so become one of the early and leading re-founders of a culture inclusive psychology in the second half of this century. Boesch combines a highly developed conscience for content-appropriate methodology with a wide thematic horizon and an impressive sensibility for the continuity among personal, social and cultural circumstances in real life.

Boesch always takes issue with concrete life situations, his own and those of other people, from his and from other cultures, including domains such as art and literature. Experiencing "Heimweh" (longing home, only partially adequate English translation possible) may be an example. Heimweh may often seize somebody gone abroad. Yet is it not that many have been drawn from home by a "Fernweh" (longing abroad)? Or have been driven out from too familiar confines by insupportable repetitions of ever the same? Can they find a new home abroad, make it really their own new home? Or will they sooner or later be pushed or drawn back, for some time or for life?

Boesch points clearly out that we miss something essential, when we attempt to convey of the inner conditions of such developments apart from the outer ones. By means of concept such subjectivation of the objective and objectivation of the subjective he tries to bridge that opposition between the I and the Non-I which is so thoroughly pervading Western thought. We humans are comporting determined by and in an action field which is composed as much of contributions of ourselves, of our longings, our fears, our beliefs, our knowledges etc. as of the characters of the things out there. And essential portions of this field are the cultural profferances of a community of people living together of which we are a part, their norms, the habits of their traditions, the expectations implicit in what they offer to and desire from each other. Even when we tend to see our actions in the service of certain goals, we cannot help but realizing that such are only the top of an iceberg of extended complex ensembles or fields of drawing and pushing forces. Boesch speaks of the polyvalence of all of our orientations and consumptions.

The sum total of such dynamics of orientation, valuation and movements are conceived by Boesch in an enhanced notion of myth. For all cultures represent themselves in manifold systems of explanations and justifications and thus mediate in particular to their younger generations essential constancies and directions of communal life. They range from mythical stories proper to abstract conceptual systems and the self-evident of everyday procedures. Children and adults could not live together without their appropriating major parts of this web of myths. Appropriation is seldom without minor or major modifications. Things and habits are proffered slightly otherwise and put on probe, so conflict may arise and must be solved, at times in imagination, at other occasions in real actions, in a multiple web of symbolic and concrete acts and values at play. Each individual acquires his or her personal versions of the myths in the form of fantasms. By personal actions determined out of the acquired any individual will contribute in turn and to a lesser or larger degree to the progression of the myths and the realities of his or her culture.

This kernel of differentiated and richly illustrated psychology makes Boesch a bridge builder between the scientific and the common-sense cultures as to the modes of understanding ourselves. While this has at the same time marked him as an outsider of the scientific mainstream it becomes increasingly evident for many considerate scholars of the human condition all around the globe that such a manner of doing psychology also make him an initiator or re-founder of a potentially new and promising constitution of this scientific endeavor.

Boesch concludes his "Symbolic Action Theory and Cultural Psychology" (1991) with these sentences:

"Such a conception, necessarily, implies responsibility. Culture is a creation of human beings, a result of choices made over generations, but also a result of continuous interactions between individuals and their group and environment. Man is the perceiver, interpreter, transformer and, to some extent, also the maker of his

world, and so he becomes also responsible for it -- each in his or her smaller or bigger ways. Trying to understand man as cultural being forced me to see the diversity of cultures as a proof of human creativity. Then, however, a strictly deterministic theoretical framework could not be appropriate anymore. For all these reasons, although having undergone quite a few theoretical influences, I unhesitatingly opted for the one which not only allows inclusion of man's creativity, but also promises to restore his dignity." (Symbolic Action Theory and Cultural Psychology. Berlin, Springer, 1991, p.367)

Do the modern social sciences including psychology really have that humanitarian complexion that psychologists often like to present to the public as their self-understanding? Have they not also grown into amplifiers of technological beliefs in infinite progression and into promoters of the application of technologies on human beings themselves? Many propose and maintain humans could be conceived as a particularly smart form of machine the functions of which could and should be optimized individually and in general. The myth of individual self-realization is seen as a task that obliges everybody in the service of and as a promise for the general betterment, vaguely enough yet proclaimed to be possible and to be best attained by "scientifically safe" procedures. In this way some earthly salvation is promised but at the same time it is thickly enmeshed in challenges and achievements that bring people on the verge of extreme successes and failures. Maximisation of success in the competition of all against all thus becomes an empty goal, often a murderous one.

Alfred Lang

Alfred Lang, Psychology, Univ. Bern, Switzerland --- lang@psy.unibe.ch

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28. Material/ /ideal 1997, 2 / 7

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28.1. Date: Sun, 26 Jan 1997 05:20:32 -0800 (PST)

From: 21602mrg@msu.edu (Mark R. Gover)
Subject: Reflections on Floor Hockey
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

XMCA'ers,

I wanted to offer these thoughts to the list since they emerge alongside my reading of Michael Cole's book, *Cultural Psychology*, currently being read by members of our Sociocultural Research Group (SCRG).

My son (age six) has recently begun floor hockey through a Saturday morning program sponsored by the local school district. This is a game in which children play in a small gymnasium using plastic sticks and a puck following more-or-less standard hockey rules/guidelines. For many kids, this is their first experience in any kind of organized sport. Throughout the game, the players are rotated among defensive and offensive positions. In addition to 2 guards and 2 forwards (defense and offense, respectively), there is a goalie [defensive] and a "floater" (both offense and defense). Not only does each position have its own strategic goals, but each of the positions is also defined by where on the court the player is allowed to roam (guards and forwards cannot cross the center line, for e.g.). Whether we're talking ice or polished gymnasium floor, kids or professionals, one thing is certain: this game moves FAST!!

Regarding explicit instruction, there is a coach who has provided ONE hour of instruction prior to the first game. That's it. Otherwise, its "Here's your stick, go play forward." There is also one referee who officiates. As a result, during the games I find myself shouting, gesturing, instructing, and encouraging, just like every other parent. This parent-coaching is constant during moments of actual play.

Recently, I was conscious at one point of how much we parents were not "spectators" in the traditional sense, but were "in" the game, an obvious scaffold for these children. I suddenly wondered what would happen if all of us: parents, coach, and referee just disappeared. What if only the kids were left and they failed to notice our departure? What would happen to the game?

My first thought is that once this scaffold collapsed, the game would tumble also, just fall apart. Maybe some other form of a game would appear. As for the formal structure of a hockey game, however, that is a pretty sophisticated artifact for young

children to arrange: a self-managing, goal-focused (pun intended) hockey game. Not only cognitively of course, but socially and emotionally.

O.K. What if instead the adults suddenly vaporized but this time the kids had the rules and guidelines down pat, they understood the game's system of rules and procedures. What then? Would they be able to apply it by coordinating a game of hockey among themselves?

As does my reading of Michael's book, *Cultural Psychology*, it brings me closer to the practical inseparability of the social and the cognitive. How does one practically divorce the socioemotional from the cognitive in the process of learning to participate in something as complicated as a formal hockey game? To presume an "ideal-driven" cultural world is to imagine that culture operates top-down, that everything flows from the ideal and that every hockey game naturally unfolds according to an ideal set of rules and procedure. Instead, from a bottom-up view, our practices PUSH us to aspire toward the ideal. One could say s/he has just witnessed an "ideal" hockey game, for example (which for some pro fans might involve an abundance of drama and violence). Is this what Mike means by an artifact being both simultaneous and ideal?

In practice, learning the rules and procedure of floor hockey proved to me absolutely and fundamentally inseparable from the social positioning it entailed. In other words, the emotional and relational experiences, what happened to these kids and how they felt about it, could not be disentangled from - and were a vital part of - their ability to internalize the game's more formal aspects.

Mark R. Gover (PH: 517.393.0721)

Educational Psychology

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28.2. Date: Sun, 26 Jan 1997 08:31:25 -0800 (PST)

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>

Subject: what does mike say?

To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Thanks for the note, Mark. I am kinda pre-occupied by a 17 month old this a.m., but here is a first pass. You write, at the end of your interesting observations:

As does my reading of Michael's book, *Cultural Psychology*, it brings me closer to the practical inseparability of the social and the cognitive. How does one practically

divorce the socioemotional from the cognitive in the process of learning to participate in something as complicated as a formal hockey game? To presume an "ideal-driven" cultural world is to imagine that culture operates top-down, that everything flows from the ideal and that every hockey game naturally unfolds according to an ideal set of rules and procedure. Instead, from a bottom-up view, our practices PUSH us to aspire toward the ideal. One could say s/he has just witnessed an "ideal" hockey game, for example (which for some pro fans might involve an abundance of drama and violence). Is this what Mike means by an artifact being both simultaneous and ideal?

In practice, learning the rules and procedure of floor hockey proved to me absolutely and fundamentally inseparable from the social positioning it entailed. In other words, the emotional and relational experiences, what happened to these kids and how they felt about it, could not be disentangled from - and were a vital part of - their ability to internalize the game's more formal aspects.

First, for those who have not seen the book (99% of us most probably), what I tried to develop in the book was a perspective that starts from artifact mediation, where artifacts are assumed to be simultaneously ideal AND material, and where coordination with the non-human and human worlds are treated symmetrically. Especially prominent in our work creating and sustaining activity system/cultures has been the intimate/incestuous relation between social, emotional, cognitive, and individual development. Your hockey example seems to exemplify a lot of the same principles if I read it correctly.

ANALYTICALLY it takes work to separate the socioemotional from the cognitive, and members themselves can bracket one or another of dimension of human experience/feeling and do so regularly. In practice, they are co-constitutive. I'll try to find an interesting statement by Marx on this general issue that I gleaned from reading Tony Wilden.... when the 17month old and other obligations permit.

mike

28.3. Date: Sun, 26 Jan 1997 15:52:30 -0800 (PST)

From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>
Subject: Floor hockey and Marx
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Mark et al-- Here is the quotation from Marx that Mark's comments reminded me of. It is at the end of an essay in Wilden's *Structure and Structure* that I mentioned earlier.

It is only in a social context that subjectivism and objectivism, spiritualism and materialism, activity and passivity cease to be antimonies, and thus cease to exist as such antimonies. The resolution of the THEORETICAL contradictions is possible ONLY through practical means, only through the PRACTICAL energy of man (sic).

There was also a useful exchange between Barabara Rogoff and Jaan Valsiner about 2 years ago in *Human Development* where Barbara was proposing the fusion of individual and context, and Jaan proposed an alternative that allowed for inclusion of separable processes as part of a single systemic whole (I'll try to find that too, time permitting).

mike

28.4. Date: Mon, 27 Jan 1997 01:28:43 +0530

To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu
From: kdbeach@msu.edu (King Beach)
Subject: floor hocky and Marx, material and ideal

Mike et al,

I thought I would jump into the conversation initiated by Mark Gover from our group here. I understand the simultaneity of the material and ideal aspects of any artifactual relation, but only as a potential that is differentially realized depending on the social practice that constitutes it at a particular moment in time. It seems to me that it would be impossible to *experience* something as simultaneously material and ideal. Whether an artifact is experienced as Heidegger's thing-in-itself or as mediating a relation with something else can shift, as in a wrecked car at the side of the road being experienced as a wrecked car, seemingly self-referential, versus a wrecked car in an art exhibit being experienced as "technological impermanence." An assumption of the simultaneity of the material and ideal aspects then becomes a useful analytic device when applied to our experiences in artifactual relations, which are never simultaneously material and ideal.

Mike, does this way of differentiating between the potential/analytic and the experiential jibe with your conception of artifact?

Cheers,

King

King Beach
448 Erickson Hall
Sociocultural Research Group Email: kdbeach@msu.edu
CEPSE, Educational Psychology Server: SCR@msu.edu

Michigan State University Web: [http://www.educ.msu.edu/
East Lansing, MI 48824 USA units/Groups/SocCult/SCRG.html](http://www.educ.msu.edu/EastLansing,MI48824USAunits/Groups/SocCult/SCRG.html)

28.5. Date: Mon, 27 Jan 1997 14:05:28 +0100

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From: Alfred Lang <lang@psy.unibe.ch>
Subject: Re:floor hocky and Marx, material and ideal
To: xmca <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

King Beach wrote in response to Mike's explanation of his notion of the artifact:

>I understand the simultaneity of the material and ideal aspects of any artifactual relation, but only as a potential that is differentially realized depending on the social practice that constitutes it at a particular moment in time. It seems to me that it would be impossible to *experience* something as simultaneously material and ideal.

King, this would perhaps depend on what you mean by "experience" and also by "simultaneously". If you allow the latter to something similar to William James' specious present, i.e. a fraction of a couple of seconds, and the former to mean something like "being affected by in various modes" a drastic example of such simultaneity would be some physical object, say a moving car, might be experienced in a trajectory eventually hitting you -- which needs some "ideation" on your part mediating between the perception and the action, whether consciously or not, and which may be instinctual of making use of earlier experience --, and you trying to evade it, and nevertheless you being pushed to the side by the airstream (which you couldn't sense in the first instant) or hit in a worse manner - which latter effects would certainly be physical or material in nature. That you might be aware of the whole event perhaps only after it's all over adds an additional touch to the potential effects of artifacts on living beings.

This suggests that the separation of material and idea(tiona)l might be an artefact in the first place; and it has certainly moved billions of ideas and of dollars and other material things in the so far unsolved question of how to put the broken "pieces together again". (I tend to call an artefact any cultural production whether you call it symbolic or real; an artifact all those gadgets made for and in everyday life in industrial and other societies.)

Best regards, Alfred

Alfred Lang, Psychology, Univ. Bern, Switzerland --- lang@psy.unibe.ch

[next AL message](#)

28.6. Date: Tue, 28 Jan 1997 09:46:54 -0800 (PST)

From: Carnegie Corporation <xfamily@weber.ucsd.edu>
Message-ID: <199701281746.JAA12284@weber.ucsd.edu>
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Subject: from P.E.Jones@shu.ac.uk

28 january 1997

from peter jones, sheffield hallam university, UK

this issue of the "simultaneity" of ideal and material in tool (artifact) mediated activity is a very interesting one. Mike Cole has raised a very fundamental philosophical issue which, as Paul Prior rightly says, was of special interest to Ilyenkov whose (difficult) work on this repays rereading. However, I believe that Ilyenkov would draw philosophical boundaries in places slightly different from where some of the contributors to the discussion might. After all, words and money are artifacts too as well as cars and nuclear weapons but for Ilyenkov the former are IDEAL and the latter MATERIAL even when we take into account (as of course we must) the essentially socio-cultural-historical existence and genesis of the latter within human practice. Ideal phenomena are ideal because their social function - their meaning or value in the case of words or money - have nothing in common with the "material" vehicles through which that function is exercised. The meaning of a word is inseparable from the word as a physical "artifact" (it is the social function of the sound envelope, in Mikhailov's words) but it has nothing in common with its material embodiment - it STANDS FOR something outside of itself, it is an OPPOSITE to the material but inseparably connected with it. Only in the course of real material practices are ideal forms generated in which the meaning and force of such forms are the "transformed forms" (Marx, Mamardashvili) or "ideal being" (Ilyenkov) of these material practices (including artifacts) and relations themselves. On the other hand, artifacts like tools (the car etc) have a function and use (ie they work) precisely on account of their material properties. These functions and uses are, of course, purely socio-historical and reflect and embody human purposes, values, etc (ie ideality) - ie they are an inseparable component of historical practices but these are MATERIAL practices (based around MATERIAL ARTIFACTS) which generate ideality as an internal moment and are then mediated by ideality. Therefore learning how to use a tool (eg the car example - learning how to drive) - involves entering a complex system of material practices mediated by ideal forms (including language). In the course of learning to drive therefore not only the bodily movements and coordinations will be learnt but also the meaning of words and other ideal forms (eg road signs) which are integrated within these material practices and from which they get their meaning. The ideal and the material therefore interpenetrate and pass into one another in material practices (there is a continuum of material and ideal to use an expression of mamardashvili): there is a moment of identity (when the hammer hits the nail in just the way we wanted it to) between

ideal and real (material) but this is an identity of opposites which should not lead us to blur the epistemological distinction between the two "sides". Does this help at all? Maybe not!!! All the best P

28.7. Date: Wed, 29 Jan 1997 11:49:00 +0100

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From: Alfred Lang <lang@psy.unibe.ch>
Subject: Re:[material/ideal] from P.E.Jones@shu.ac.uk
To: xmca <xmca@weber.ucsd.edu>

Peter,

I doubt that it will be possible to give a solution to those centuries old dualism problems on the basis of Ilyenkov or any other dialectical or otherwise entangled or biased thinker whether they want to make the ideal material or the material ideational. When matter and form are separated in the first place, problems of dualism are created that are better dissolved (rather than solved) simply by not separating what never occurs separately anyhow.

>Ideal phenomena are ideal because their social function - their meaning or value in the case of words or money - have nothing in common with the "material" vehicles through which that function is exercised.

Have you ever seen or otherwise identified "ideal phenomena" that have occurred, i.e. have had effects on anything other than themselves, which had really "nothing in common" with their "'material' vehicles"? In mean "in common" in the sense that they were not absolutely dependent on some material form, although it was not essential what that exactly was? Indeed, money can have or be involved in having effects in metal or bills form, in plastic, in letters, even spoken (I promise to give you so much when you do ...) or in internal awareness (since I do not have so much free in my budget, I cannot afford this impressive computer) or action form (instead I buy a bouquet of roses for my beloved). You can threaten or love with words, with eyes, with gestures, with "weapons" (daggers or roses, and even with money) etc.

If you do not believe in parapsychology, I think, you cannot avoid assuming that all effects between and within organisms and including cultural artefacts are impossible without formed matter-energy, whether they involve vibrating air, graphite sticking on paper, radio wave fields, electrochemical pattern in nervous tissue or muscles, moving machine parts, electrons' flow in chips and wire structures or patterned fluorescent discharges on screens etc. etc. It is true that there are "brute" effects of formed matter-energy such as gravity of large masses, inertia of moving bodies, fields of electromagnetic radiation etc., and parties of life and culture cannot avoid taking such into account. But much of the formed matter on this planet also has "finer" effects which are based on the fact that it has

become so formed as it is by a common history with other formed matter (thus better called structures, and often quite dynamic ones). The result of this is that many of these structures "know" and "learn" about each other and in suitable selective interaction or transaction can produce unheard of effects, unheard of from the viewpoint of formed matter interacting on the "brute" level.

What you elaborate as an inevitable and categorical distinction appears to be not more than the distinction between structures in the role of mediators that are found and mediators that are made, made occasionally by the user herself, but mostly by others, so in fact also "found" and perhaps modified by the actual user. In other words, the distinction between signs or signals on the one hand, and symbols, i.e. signs requiring some convention or other agreement or common history, on the other. Sometimes the former is ascribed to nature, the latter to culture. But viewed from a little distance, both are normally the result of a history. Whereby the latter and shorter history builds upon the longer former, in fact often using or reshaping the emergencies of the former in new combinations and elaborations.

>The ideal and the material therefore interpenetrate and pass into one another in material practices (there is a continuum of material and ideal to use an expression of mamardashvili): there is a moment of identity (when the hammer hits the nail in just the way we wanted it to) between

>ideal and real (material) but this is an identity of opposites which should not lead us to blur the epistemological distinction between the two "sides".

Is the ideal not as real as the material? Did it not shape in important measure our present world as it really is? If there is interpenetration and even identity -- only for moments? -- why then should we stick to an epistemological stance (or ideology) originating from an era when the idea of an evolutive world (e.g. by Heraclites) was refuted for fear it might forbid a decent living together with reliable others (e.g. by Platon -- have we really become more reliable by dividing ourselves into a material body and an ideal self?)? And what do we accept this separation of the world into a true, i.e. ideal real and a shadowy, i.e. failing real that was much later fixed in a vain attempt to push human rationality (which was, unfortunately, only some half of the ideational, emotionality shut out!) in some role hitherto taken by some notion of God transcending this world? Why not, better than "blur" the distinction, build on the inevitable inseparability of matter, form, and energy and the actual patterns of such compounds having emerged in natural and cultural history and further changing in open evolution, to quite a considerable degree under human responsibility?

I am sorry when much of this might sound dark at first reading. But it's already too long anyway and there are so many places where this basically alternative view of the world needs elaboration that such is better offered for the asking.

Yours, Alfred

Alfred Lang, Psychology, Univ. Bern, Switzerland --- lang@psy.unibe.ch

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The XLCHC welcome, 1991

Date: Mon, 23 Sep 91 12:00:26 pdt
From: xfamily@weber.ucsd.edu (Carnegie Foundation)
Subject: Welcome Document
To: xlchc@ucsd.edu

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AN ORIGIN MYTH

XLCHC came into being in 1984 as a medium for discussion of research on learning and development with a general concern for issues of education in modern technological societies and a special concern about the ways in which educational systems are a source of socially engendered social inequality. The "call letters" of this discussion group (to borrow terminology from another medium) indicate its initial goals. LCHC is the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, a research unit founded at the Rockefeller University in the early 1970's which moved to the University of California, San Diego in 1978. Until 1984, LCHC had an ethnically diverse faculty that conducted an active post-doctoral program in the use of comparative methods for studying culture and cognition with special interest in problems of learning and development in school and non-school settings. By 1984, two years into the Reagan-Bush era, we had lost virtually all of our minority group faculty, our research concerns were explicitly rejected by federal funding agencies, and we were denied post-doctoral funds on the grounds that there was insufficient minority group faculty. :-)

XLCHC was one response to this non-benign neglect. The "X" in the title had a dual significance: First, it was meant to provide a medium for continued interaction and cooperation by the many visitors and post-doctoral fellows with whom we had interacted in the past, that is, for "ex-LCHCers." Second, it was meant to provide a broadened constituency for discussion of the issues traditionally associated with the Laboratory by including scholars and graduate students from around the world who wished to participate.

The technical organization of XLCHC is designed to be minimally constraining. XLCHC and its sub-conferences exist as lists of addresses in the social science computer facility at UCSD. A message sent to an X-address is simply re-routed to all addressees with no filtering. A file containing all such mail traffic is stored at LCHC as a form of collective memory, but it is rarely consulted (which means that XLCHC is a sort of "decorticate" entity!).

NORMS AND CONVENTIONS

During the past 6-7 years XLCHC has grown from a dozen or so participants to over 300. Very naturally, the topics under discussion have expanded to fit the interests of new members. A few weeks of observation will give you a feel for how things work. Any member of the discussion group is welcome to send messages to xlchc or its subconferences on a topic (or topics) they feel will be of interest to the group addressed, or because they are seeking information that the members of xlchc might be able to provide. Everyone is welcome to respond to any message and participate in any discussion. When responding, it is best to compose a new message and send it to the appropriate x-entity and not to reply owing to the technicalities of the system's constitution. It is also perfectly acceptable to send to the individual who initiated the message alone if one does not intend the reply as part of the group discussion.

If the past is any guide to the future, some messages will generate considerable discussion, some will be met by silence. Silence is not a reliable indicator of the message's value to the group: it may be that no one is interested in the topic; it may be that there is general agreement, but nothing to add, or it may be that people do not feel competent to add to the discussion and do not know how to ask a good question about it. In such cases one can try again or simply wait to see what develops.

A general norm for the system is that messages are informal communications, what have sometimes been referred to on XLCHC as "half baked" messages, which, it is hoped, will be baked up into fine food for thought as a consequence of the interactions that occur subsequently. From time to time, xlchc messages appear in articles or books, with some form of acknowledgement of their source. The norm in this case, as in daily use of the system is to be considerate of one's colleagues.

SOME HINTS FOR MORE EFFICIENT USE OF E-MAIL

Presentation of xgroups.

Upon joining one was sent a copy of the current subscriber list.

Subject line practices.

Messaging practices.

Advice on reading and writing mail.

Advice on mailer daemons.

MAILER DAEMONS

The most common cause of bounced mail (or mailer daemons) is that the message is incorrectly addressed. Make sure your alias files are up- to-date.

Occasionally, mail will bounce for reasons unknown. It is addressed correctly, but here it comes back at you, saying things like "user unknown," "host unknown," or "user node unknown." You KNOW the address is correct, you KNOW the account is current! What IS the problem? The answer...sometimes you just can't tell. Experience has shown these situations are usually caused by interference over the lines or a temporary shut down of one of the host machines used along the way. The problem will usually clear up within a matter of hours.

If the problem doesn't resolve itself after a day, it definitely requires further investigation. At this point it would be advisable to save the address that's bouncing to a temporary file, delete it from your alias file and contact a consultant for help. Once a solution has been reached re-enter the address in your alias file.

Rarely, a message will get caught in a "loop" and continually repeat itself. This can be very nasty indeed. Report it IMMEDIATELY to your system operator who will then try to track down the problem, resolve it, or find someone who can.

CITING XLCHC MESSAGES

During the past year there has been extensive discussion of conventions for citing mail encountered in the X-family. The current convention is the following:

1. If you cite a message, whether or not you quote its content, you should ask permission of the sender.

2. Assuming you have permission of the sender, the citation form is (for example).

M.Cole. (1991). Citations. Message sent on the electronic mail discussion, XLCHC. September 20.

3. Secondary analyses of xlchc activities which identify no individuals, but simply recount the themes discussed or provide descriptions of the flow of activity in general require no prior permission, but it is expected that they will be posted on xlchc for the edification of its membership.

THE CONVENTION OF LAST RESORT-- All conventions can be changed at the will of the participants.

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XMCA selfdescription of Alfred Lang - at start of new xlist in 1995

Date: Sun, 8 Oct 1995 12:23:20 +0000
From: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)
Subject: lang@psy.unibe.ch (Alfred Lang)
To: xmca

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Alfred Lang, born 1935, is Professor of Psychology at the University of Bern, Switzerland. His teaching is in General Psychology (Perception, Motivation, Action) and in Environmental and Cultural Psychology (Emphasis on Dwelling, Urban Condition, Person in Culture, Theory), formerly also in Personality and Early Child Development. I have broad interests in contributing to an empirical science of the Human Condition that embraces both the biotic and the cultural character of that species.

My dominating concern pertains to constructing a general and unitary conceptual framework called Semiotic Ecology which is to conceive biotic, individual and socio-cultural evolutions on the basis of the same conceptual tools. Semiotic Ecology interprets the idea of the Ecological Function Circle or Psychological-Environmental Field (von Uexkuell, Lewin) in terms of a Peircean semiotic as progressive structure formation in all kinds of ecological systems. My semiotic attempts to supplant the interpretative stance of most semiotics by the generative, structure forming, actualizing, and modifying potential of semiosis in that it can afford the evolutionally fundamental operations of branching (or variation production) and merging (or selective evaluation) in the process of bringing forth new structures. It claims to be fully un-dualistic in that it does not need to presuppose any subject-object or matter-mind and related oppositions. Semiotic Ecology, in particular, serves as a base to propose a non-Cartesian Cultural Psychology which focusses on the evolutive dialogical or reciprocal evolutive formation of persons and culture in communities of various ranges.

On the empirical side, I am especially interested in the role of artifacts of all kinds; so these ideas are put on probe in a project to understand the Dwelling Activity or People with their Things in their Rooms. I also find it suitable to contribute to anchoring presentday cultural psychology in a heritage from times before scientific psychology started building its one-sided dead-end. Of a list of some four dozens of culture-inclusive thinkers on and researchers of the human condition from the mid 18th to the mid 20th century I have found, to my own astonishment, J.G. Herder (1744-1804) to be the most complete cultural psychologist so far. In

May 1996, I am organizing, for the Gesellschaft fuer Kulturpsychologie, a symposium on Pioneers of Cultural Psychological Thought.

Alfred Lang Internet: lang@psy.unibe.ch
Psychology, Univ. of Bern, Unitobler, Muesmattstr. 45, CH-3000 Bern 9
Home (preferably): Hostalen 106, CH-3037 Herrenschwanden Switzerland

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XMCA selfdescription of Mike Cole, 1995

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[To the interview with Mike Cole](#)



Date: Mon, 11 Sep 1995 13:47:25 -0700
From: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>
Subject: Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu>
To: xmca

I am a professor of Communication and Psychology at U.C. San Diego and director of the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition (LCHC). My central interest is in the role of culture in human development; increasing in recent years I have tried to develop a cultural-historical activity approach to human cognition which combines ideas derived from several national traditions of cultural-historical theorizing. Along with my LCHC colleagues I became interested in computer mediated discussion groups in the early 1980's as a means of continuing to interact with students and colleagues who spent time at LCHC, but moved away in pursuit of their careers. Over the years, I have found this form of interaction especially valuable in supporting fruitful discussions about culture and development social categories that so often impede cooperation including gender, status, discipline, ethnicity, and national origin.

My current research is focused on the design and implementation of activity systems in community settings that combine play, education, and peer interaction. Participants in these systems include elementary-age school children and undergraduates. I study these systems as microcultures and attempt to use them to implement the cultural-historical principle that development always involves the simultaneous operation of several genetic domains simultaneously.

Information concerning these efforts can be found in a recent article, "Socio-cultural-historical psychology: some general remarks and a proposal for a new kind of

cultural-genetic methodology" in J.Wertsch, P. Del Rio, & A. Alvarez, *Sociocultural studies of mind*, Cambridge University Press.1995

A more extensive presentation is found in Cole's book, published in the year after this xmca self-description:

Cole, Michael. 1996. Cultural psychology: a once and future discipline. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press

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[To the interview with Mike Cole](#)

XMCA selfdescription of Eva Ekeblad, 1995

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Date: Tue, 12 Sep 1995 08:42:10 +0100
From: eva.ekeblad@ped.gu.se (Eva Ekeblad)
Subject: eva.ekeblad@ped.gu.se (Eva Ekeblad)
To: xmca

Eva Ekeblad

S-47 05 06

Grad student and also research assistant in Pedagogik, as the field is institutionalised in Sweden.

Writing on my more and more nearly finished phenomenographic dissertation on first-grade children approaching numbers in a computer context: puzzling most of all over what the perceived "ownership" of numbers may do to children's learning -- i.e. this is the riddle I do not solve.

Working also on a project where, in addition to tying up loose ends from studies into how the computer may promote conceptual change, we will follow the middle primary grade children and teachers in a small rural school (three mixed-age classes) which is about to plunge into the world of the Internet.

Reading mostly literature which I think will help my understanding both on how people learn in educational settings and how the form of learning called research proceeds. I keep looking back to see where we are going. Mixing Gadamer, Skinner, Schegloff and Walkerdine, Lave and Latour... to just take a few. Also looking across cultures, which is dearly needed in this province of Terra.

-- can't say I enjoy getting into the limelight in THIS particular way.

Eva E.

Dissertation now finished:

Ekeblad, Eva. 1996. Children's Learning of Numbers. A phenomenographic excursion into first-grade children's arithmetic. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.

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XMCA selfdescription of Christine Happle, 1997

[To the interview with Mike Cole
to the description of the 5th Dimension
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Date: Tue, 11 Nov 1997 09:55:04 +0200
From: christine happle <christine.happle.1@sm-philhist.unibe.ch>
Subject: chrstine happle <christine.happle.1@sm-philhist.unibe.ch>
To: xmca@weber.ucsd.edu

Self description of Christine Happle

I taught in a Swiss primary school from 1986-1994. In co-operation with the teachers' training college I have supervised students in their first experience of teaching a class. In addition, I still teach classes in the in-service training of teachers.

Since 1994 I have studied Environmental- /Ecological Psychology with Prof. A. Lang and Educational Psychology with Prof. W. Herzog at the University of Bern, Switzerland. I have been influenced and fascinated by A. Lang's conceptual framework called Semiotic Ecology and his lectures on perception. Based on my teaching experiences I have become interested in processes of change and in the role of culture, especially in complex teaching and learning environments. Furthermore, I am very interested in the current reseach of M. Cole and therefore I plan to participate in his [5th Dimension](#) project at the LCHC.

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Interview with Mike Cole

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by Christine Happle

San Diego, April 20, 1998

Introduction

It is a gorgeous sunny and warm April day in 1998, in California. I'm Christine Happle from the University of Bern, where I'm studying Environmental and Cultural Psychology with Professor Alfred Lang.

I am staying right now at the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition at UC San Diego. I'm studying the 5th Dimension, which was invented and developed by Mike Cole and Peg Griffin in 1986.

I will be interviewing Mike Cole, the Director of the LCHC about his connection with Alfred Lang.

Interview

CHRISTINE HAPPLE: Mike Cole, Professor Alfred Lang from the University of Bern will retire this year. As a scholar from the cultural-historical realm you emphasize that history is essential for our understanding. What kind of history connects you with Alfred Lang? How did you find each other?

MIKE COLE: Well, since this is the one question you are asking that I knew about ahead of time, I have created a little bit of a history of my interactions with Alfred and it took me some time to remember how it was that we first came in contact. I believe it was from, it was mediated by his long-term colleague, Urs Fuhrer, who visited here nearby at the division of social ecology, I believe at the University of California, Irvine. Urs thought that I might be an appropriate person to invite to a Festschrift-type meeting that Alfred was organizing for Ernst Boesch. I think that is how Alfred and I got into discussion. That must have been in 1990-91.

Then Alfred and I started to correspond around what might be the possible topic of my contribution to the Festschrift for Boesch and I involved in that discussion a Russian colleague of mine, Evgenii Subbotski. Subbotski and I had been discussing the problem of different names, the problem of layers, the problem of what happens to prior stages of cognitive development when children develop through a later stage and in connection with that discussion I got Alfred involved in our international electronic email discussion, which at that time I think was called XLCHC and is now called XMCA. One of the things that I can remember quite clearly was Alfred's impression in these early discussions that cultural-historical psychologists, Vygotsky in particular, were dualists. And of course, semiotic ecology is one of the contemporary schools of psychology which is trying to overcome Cartesian dualism but I rejected Alfred's view since I considered myself to be also anti-Cartesian I wasn't going to accept the fact that by implication that I was a Cartesian.

So, initially our discussions occurred through email. I don't remember why but for some reason something happened so that I could not actually go to the conference. Subbotski went and gave the paper instead but I still wanted to see if I could find a way to meet Alfred. What I began, I have to step back a bit and say, that Alfred entered into our discussion on XLCHC and immediately attracted the interests of other people, among whom was our colleague, Arne Raeithel, who died recently. Alfred and Arne and I began to discuss the possibility of an international project which would, I think we called it "Action and Culture," something like that, but the idea of the project was to try to bring together people who could be considered in my view a cultural-historical psychologists and in Alfred's view semiotic-ecological psychologists but we spent a lot of time talking about who our 19th century precursors were, who were the very important scholars in the 19th century who lead to our ideas and of course two people who were very important for, the most important person in some ways for Alfred was C.S. Peirce, the American pragmatic philosopher, a semiotician and also people like Kurt Lewin, the German ecological psychologist, and so along with Arne we concocted this project, the idea which was to gather current scholars who had some old-time hero. So, for me it might be that the old-time hero would be John Dewey for example and for Alfred it might be C.S. Peirce and for Arne it could have been Peirce because Arne was also very interested in Peirce but let's say for Arne it could have been Leont'ev or somebody in activity theory.

What are other key points of comparison and contrast between the Semiotic Ecology and cultural-historical Psychology?

Could you speak to : --- the differences in the philosophical roots, --- the unit of analysis --- the importance of semiotic in comparison to mediation in cultural-historical Psychology?

You know, that is an issue that I am still trying to explore. I think that there is a lot in common and I have been struggling to understand whether or not there are any really important significant differences that would have empirical implications or

that would have implications for how we do apply psychological theories in practice. In practice, the way he collected his data, especially from this large project that he conducted in recent years, he observed people in their homes over long periods of time looking at how the activities that they engaged in, in the way which they used their spaces in their homes, changed over time. So that was very much like a kind of ecological psychology of the sort that one might find from Erwin Altmann or earlier the American Barker. Our approach was really quite different, where we actually design activities, but in each case you have the idea that human beings live in a world transformed by the activity of prior human beings. It comes to them in the present in the form of artifacts through mediated activity. That is, both are semiotic theories, so they are both semiotic theories they are both ecological theories and I am just not certain what, still I'm studying these, what the major points of difference would be that is part of the on-going discussion with Alfred, his students and colleagues.

Arne Raeithel, Alfred Lang and you once planned a project back in 1993, which was called "Acting in Culture." Could you explain, what this project was about? And why it did not come alive?

Well I have already said a little bit what it was about. My notion was that there was a lot in common among us and I wanted to find a way to systematic to explore what was similar and what was different, and they did too. For example, we got together at the International Congress in Brussels. I'm not sure exactly when that was, I think it was, I thought it was in 1992, but it might have been 1994, but I thought it was in 1992. We spent a good deal of time talking there about how to do it. We would use, at that time we didn't have the world wide internet, it was just coming on, but we knew we could interact. The idea was that we would spend a certain amount of time together, a certain amount of time apart, have a couple of meetings and see if we couldn't articulate what's the full range of ideas within this sort of general realm that seemed to be a lot in common between us. The first phase was to establish what the range of ideas was and in the second stage to talk about the different realms of practice - in design of homes, for Arne in the design of cooperative work environments, for me the design of developmental productive environments for children and we got other people involved in the project as well. As to why it didn't get funded - it's difficult to say, it was very international and no one country seemed to think that its interests were sufficiently represented to make it worthwhile to fund the project.

Was it probably not the right time?

That's also hard to say. In some sense we are continuing that same project now, it's just we are using other opportunities. For example I visited in Bern at the time of Alfred's 60th birthday. Arne and I and Alfred, until Arne's death, corresponded about this, but now many other people are involved. I think other people see something that we saw several years ago, which was this family of theories and approaches

that we wanted to bring together more closely. For example, Urs Fuhrer, has been recently working on theories from George Simmel, which clearly again are part of somehow of the same family, we want to continue to try to develop our understanding of those similarities and differences. And happily I think, this June we will get together in the International Congress in Aarhus. Last year and the year before we got together in Geneva at a conference, so we are just using the opportunities for... or via electronic mail and travel, we have you visiting here. I'd be delighted to have my students delighted to go and spend time in Bern. Now I'd say that we have a kind of a little international group that we thought about exists de facto even without any grant.

Alfred Lang is concerned that the strict translation of the term cultural psychology into German takes on the unfortunate and incorrect meaning of subsidiary elements of cultural aspects of psychology. Can you clarify for a German audience the larger meaning of the term.

I share his concern because there are many who think you have cultural psychology, you have social psychology, you have organizational psychology, you have ecological psychology... so myself, I am made uncomfortable also by the term cultural psychology but it's come to be accepted for those people who believe that meaning-making is the fundamental characteristic of human psychological activity. It's like an umbrella term. It does NOT mean that it is a sub part of psychology. I can't speak for Alfred but I can speak for myself and I can speak for the Russian tradition, which has very much influenced me, and that is that I refer to cultural historical activity theory, but cultural historical psychology assumes that human beings are hybrids of the biological, the cultural-historical, the ontogenetic and the moment-to-moment micro-genetic processes that constitute them. And in that sense and certainly from the point of view of the Russians and from my own point of view cultural psychology is what psychology should be. It doesn't mean that it excludes biology or physiology, you can study organizations and it is simply an assertion that culture is fundamental to human nature and any psychology which ignores that fact, distorts human nature in it's theories.

Could you explain what is the difference of importance of semiotic in comparison to mediation in cultural-historical psychology.

I think that is a core issue, that's an issue that Alfred and I are still discussing. I think that they are practically synonyms. To say semiotic mediated action or to say just even that, any culturally mediated action is semiotically mediated action because the fact that it is mediated through artifacts means that it is a process of making meaning and so I myself don't see any principle difference. That doesn't mean that there aren't people who do see differences and make distinctions that I don't make, but you are asking me a question that I keep asking Alfred, so I think this is just a point for probably our students to clarify after we are gone.

You mentioned Arne Raeithel, Yrjö Engeström and Alfred Lang at the AERA meeting on reflection and future of the Cultural Historical Activity Theory. What is Alfred Lang's role in this picture?

Well I think, sort of I touched on that in my earlier remarks, I think that Alfred is very important first of all in holding Peirce into the conversation, because I myself don't draw directly on Peirce, but I do draw on George Herbert Mead and John Dewey and they lived and worked at the same time and the same place that Peirce did. Then I think it is also important that Alfred brings along with others a, Alfred is a Swiss, but I do associate it with a sort of German psychological perspective that I primarily associate with the older generation with Kurt Lewin, whereas I might focus on somebody like Roger Barker. That means that when Alfred and I talk about ecology or social ecology or cultural socio-ecology it is in some sense like having Barker and Lewin, we are representing those people who are our own forefathers. That is why our initial project was to try to go and clarify the contemporary relevance and these different forefathers for psychological theory.

Do you think that you will pick it up again as a project or you just will use it.

Well, we are getting older. My own view is that we are engaging in that project right now. In June when I go to Aarhus, I know that Alfred and I will sit down and we will compare ideas, we are planning a special issue of our journal Mind, Culture and Activity devoted to the work of Alfred and his colleagues. We will use whatever opportunities life affords us to get together and try to develop the ideas. I think the fact that we have a journal is trying to do what that project is trying to do, is a significant factor that wasn't true at that time. Arne is no longer with us, but Alfred and Yrjö Engeström and others are involved in that journal and I think that is a very good medium to try to develop some cultural historical, semiotic ecological approach.

Thanks a lot.

It was my pleasure.

It was nice to speak with you and thanks a lot for my stay here. It was really a fascinating learning milieu.

The only problem with your stay here is that it is too short.

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5th Dimension, more than a meta-game to improve literacy?

Written by Christine Happle, April, 28th 1998

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The 5th Dimension is depicted by researchers as a fun and educational after-school activity for 6-12 year old children. This model system was initially invented to improve children's literacy through mediation by computer games, undergraduates, a cyberspace matron and other specially designed mediating artifacts. The program was designed using a cultural historical activity the theoretical perspective, particularly intended to evoke Vygotsky's learning principle of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). My starting-point, as

I came to the LCHC in December of 1997 was this child-centered view. I was only familiar with the limited literature on the 5th Dimension accessible in Europe at the time.

Soon, I realized that the 5th Dimension was much more complex, and colorful than my image of it. The active creation of a new 5th Dimension site, intended as a research environment, provides a rich opportunity for investigating the dialogical evolution of both structures: living organism and milieu. I now see the 5th Dimension as a generalized model - named after the prototype which was evolved together with a successful but not sustained 'Question-Asking-Reading' literacy-program at local school in the afterschool hours. I was researching mainly the oldest site the 5th Dimension at Boys and Girls Club (B&G; Club) in Solana Beach California. Each new site was developed as a co-evolved open system in a school or a nonprofit host institution and as site of educational/child care practicum for young adults (undergraduates, high school teens) oriented towards teacherly, social-oriented or research-oriented career goals. Undergraduate programs at the University including distance learning and the research laboratories are other components in these constantly changing and growing complex structure. All components of this ongoing process could be centered or focused and narrowed down in a research process of their own.



The typical learning milieu for the children and the undergraduates in the 5th Dimension emerges through an interrelated set of artifacts (computer, games, maze, task cards, constitution, cyber matron, ...), a typical pattern of participant duration and a typical division of labor or/and play. The theory-driven design of the 5th Dimension serves multiple purposes. Location, furniture and the salary of the site coordinator are often provided by the host-organization. The practical details, theoretical background and support of the ongoing educational development of the students and the site coordinators is contributed by the University. Today, twelve years after the prototype was designed, over 35 mutations are co-evolving with their environments in colorful diversity in California and through out the world (New Zealand, Mexico, Sweden, Russia, Australia, Israel and Spain).



The phenomenon of the 5th Dimension site at the B&G; Club in Solana Beach, comes alive four times a week for one and a half hours a day. The flow of the ongoing activity is supervised or rather supported, by the site coordinator. From an other perspectives the activity could be seen as a meta-game, where kids loosely pair up with undergraduates and travel through a maze of computer games. The maze is used to distribute the resources on a flexible basis. Child, undergraduate and computer form a relative stable triangle, semi-permeable for incoming information provided by experts like children walking by, site coordinator, visitors or through mediation by task cards, encyclopedias, hint books and the materialized, wooden maze.

The maze is of about 1,5m x 2m x 15cm placed on a tall table is in Lang terms an ExtrA-presentant of the metaphor and serves as both big board game and organizing tool, limiting the range of choices to two games in each room and challenging the participants with three levels of achievement: beginner, good and expert, mediated by task cards. Task cards are tools which support or constrain the undergraduates and children together to achieve a more strategic, effective, fun and reflective involment in ways that goes beyond what the games on the market provide and integrate the game in the meta-game. The 5th



Dimension is mainly composed of computer games, however hand craft and board games, and other activities are always there. The choice of which way one wants to go in the maze increases, depending on more competence or performance in the previous game. The children's and undergraduates' location is re-presented in the wooden maze by a cardboard circle. Undergraduates' and young wizard assistants' positions are represented by a Polaroid picture. Having a token like this marking

the place in the maze allows one to drop in and out of the meta-game and its fiction world at will.



As a newcomer a child is paired up with an undergraduate, usually by the site coordinator. The pair starts in the middle of the maze "cosmic entrance". Together they read the constitution, which explains that the 5th Dimension was created by the wizard or the wizardess, who resides in cyberspace. They are given an application form to fill in, a passport to track the journey, a folder to keep all of it, and a first task card to play the game. Each game is mediated by task cards. Higher levels include some kind of reflection, which is mediated e.g. through writing mail to the wizard, writing a hint for an other child, or writing to an other site in the system. Completing ten games on expert and ten games on a good level allows the child to become a Young Wizard Assistant (YWA). Broader opportunities like Internet access or creating an own home page, are YWA tasks, but also helping others or explaining the 5th to visitors and novices, including undergraduates at the start of a new quarter term at the site orientation day. The status of achieving a Young Wizards Assistant, is celebrated by a casual American party with cake and soft drinks: whuu hu!

Would you like to learn more about the 5th Dimension? Its Web Doorway is at

<http://communication.ucsd.edu/Fifth.Dimension/index.html>

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Eine Nebengeschichte über und für Professor Alfred Lang

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von Christine Happle

"Die Verbindung des Neuen mit dem Alten bedeutet nicht eine bloße Zusammensetzung von Kräften, sie ist eine Neuschöpfung, bei der der bestehende Antrieb Form und Festigkeit erhält, während das alte 'abgelagerte' Material buchstäblich wiederbelebt wird, indem ihm, in eine neue Situation versetzt, neues Leben, eine neue Seele verliehen wird..." (Dewey)

Auch Sie - liebe Leserin und lieber Leser - werden diese neue Nebengeschichte mit Ihrem 'alten abgelagerten Material' verbinden, Sie werden sie vor ihrem Erfahrungshintergrund lesen und so Ihre Persönlichkeit während dem Lesen einbringen. Das bedeutet: In den folgenden Lesemomenten verleihen Sie in Verbindung und dank Ihrer persönlichen Lebenserfahrung dieser für alle gleichen Nebengeschichte eine 'neue Seele', dabei wird Altes und Neues ineinander verwoben und eine Ihnen eigene Bedeutung kreierte, ähnlich derer anderer Lesenden und doch verschieden in der Färbung. Es freut mich, dass Sie Nebengeschichten als bedeutungsvoll erachten und ihr Ihre Aufmerksamkeit schenken. Die Nebengeschichte entstand 1998 während meines viermonatigen Aufenthaltes am 'Laboratory of Cognitive Human Cognition' (LCHC) an der 'University of California of San Diego' (UCSD).

Die "[unvergessliche Schule](#)" Das Haus darf man nicht vergessen. In "five minute walking distance" nah dem imposanten, ufoförmigen, gläsernen Betongebäude der Geiselbibliothek an der UCSD, unerwarteterweise im Hochparterre von drei nah nebeneinander gelegenen Baracken, die Wege dazwischen auf Holzbrücken mit rotem Belag in die Höhe verdoppelt, welche die Banalität der Grundrisse durch ihre Verschlungenheit aufheben, lag das LCHC. Von der Eingangs- und Ausgangstüre kommend, umsäumt mit Büro- und andern Räumen, trafen sich die leicht verschobenen Korridore in der Mitte des länglichen Gebäudes und machten gemeinsam Platz für das "Herz" einer roten Sofaecke mit zwei Sesseln und einem einquadratmetergrossen Clutisch aus Holz. Abhängig von den kulturellen, universitären und persönlichen Arbeitsrhythmen, war hier am Empfangs- und Erholungsort das Verschieben aller Rhythmen gegeneinander im unregelmässigen Zusammentreffen der Menschen offensichtlich oder am dynamischen Geräuschpegel im ganzen Labor hörbar. Mich faszinierte wie sich nonchalante, spassige

Pausenunterhaltungen ungeahnt zu hochinteressanten projekt- oder wissenschaftsbezogenen Diskussionen entwickelten: Eine spielerisches, authentisches Lernmilieu! Anders der angrenzende Sitzungsraum, ausgefüllt durch den grossen Tisch und mit Stühlen umgeben, platzte er regelmässig jeden Montag aus allen Nähten und wurde Ort der geplanten Diskussion, Information, Kooperation,...: Auch ein Ort des gegenseitigen Lernens, für mich ein Ort an dem das Wort Kooperation eine tiefere Bedeutung bekam. In der ersten 5th Dimension Projekt Sitzung kam ich in diesem Sitzungsraum gegenüber Scott Woodbridge zu sitzen, einem Kalifornier, der mir durch sein "easy-going" Verhalten auffiel. Scott Woodbridge, dessen Vorfahren aus Schottland eingewandert sind, studierte bei Professor Doktor Michael Cole, dem Direktor des Forschungslabors. Aber war es überhaupt so gewesen? Fiel mir Scott Woodbridge wirklich in der ersten Projekt Sitzung auf? Nein, das habe ich mir erst später zurechtgelegt. Da war es schon eine Nebengeschichte; ich konnte nicht mehr unterscheiden. Die Erinnerung an den LCHC Aufenthalt, der mir als Forschungspraktikum und Ort der Lizentiats-Datenaufnahme diente, wurde nach einigen Erzählungen meinerseits zu Geschichten. In Wahrheit hatte Scott Woodbridges langjährige Erfahrung mit dem 5th Dimension-Projekt. In der Rolle des 'Site Coordinators', einer Rolle der ich auch in meiner Lizentiatsarbeit nachgehen werde, erweckte er beispielsweise vor Jahren täglich das 5th Dimension in Solana Beach zum Leben. Im Moment meines Aufenthaltes betreute er den Aufbau einer neuen Site in der Stadt und leitete zusammen mit Mike Cole einen 'undergraduate course' in welchem die Studierenden Artefakte für das 5th Dimension entwickelten. Dies alles und noch viel mehr erkannte ich erst allmählich, während ich am LCHC - diesem faszinierenden Lernmilieu - über das 5th Dimension lernte. Wie sich später erweisen sollte, war Scott Woodbridge zufällig auf für mich auf bedeutungsvolle Weise mit meinem Hauptfach-Professor Alfred Lang vom psychologischen Institut der Universität Bern in der Schweiz verknüpft. In meinem Tagebuch, einem steten Begleiter habe ich Impressionen der ersten Woche festgehalten: "It is as if I had dreamed, but the dream is real! I jumped into an ongoing process and it's exciting to see, to hear, to feel, to think, to act, to be involved and to become a little part of this complex ecological system. I feel very welcome here at the lab, even though I'm not a doctoral student...But, why me? Why am I here at the LCHC?" Natürlich rechtfertigt meine pädagogische Vorerfahrung als Primarlehrerin von 6-12 jährigen Kindern meinen Aufenthalt am LCHC, der Schnittstelle von Kulturpsychologie und Pädagogik. Trotzdem blieb die Frage: Warum hat mir Professor Alfred Lang das 5th Dimension Projekt anfangs 1997 in einer Veranstaltungspause als Forschungs-Praktikumsort vorgeschlagen? In jener belanglosen Veranstaltungspause, banal alltäglich beim Getränkeautomaten der Universität Tobler, begann mein Forschungsabenteuer. Oder ist der Anfang in Prof. Alfred Langs verblüffenden, zuweilen verwirrenden, meist faszinierenden Wahrnehmungsvorlesungen zu suchen, die mich erkennen liessen, wie sehr wir Menschen in unserer Wahr- Falschnehmung, Kultur und Geschichte gefangen sind, oder in meinem Widerstreben gegen die zunehmend verschulden und bevormundenden Bestimmungen des Studienplanes für Psychologie, oder in meiner Anfrage bei Prof. Lang nach einem Praktikumsort im englischen Sprachraum, oder im Wil-

len meine eigene Kultur wieder einmal im Spiegel einer anderen anders wahrzunehmen, oder vielleicht in meinem beharrlichen Wunsch nach einem kreativen Prozess des Verbindens des "Neuen mit dem Alten", welcher auf meinen selbstgewählten Lizentiatsleitspruch von Dewey zurückgeführt werden kann, oder...wo ist der Anfang? Wo ist der Anfang des Abenteuers später des Lizentiatsabenteuers, des Anfangs des Endes meines verschulten Psychologiestudiums? Prof. Alfred Langs Aussprüche über die Willkürlichkeit von Sequenzsetzungen, kommt mir in den Sinn. Wie auch immer - ich malte mir, nach Prof. Langs Kurzbeschreibung, das 5th Dimension phantasievoll als grosses Raumlabyrinth mit Computerplätzen aus, durch welches sich Kinder spielerisch bewegen. Meine Neugierde ähnlich wie in der Wahrnehmungsvorlesung war geweckt und begleitet mich seit damals. Ich sagte spontan zu! Im Verlauf des Themenfindungsprozesses für meine Lizentiatsarbeit entwickelte sich im gegenseitigen Austauschprozess mit Prof. Alfred Lang die Idee, das 5th Dimension aus wohnpsychologischer Sicht mit dem semiotisch-ökologischen Ansatz zu erforschen, obwohl meine Vorbildung als möglicherweise seiner letzten Studentin, noch nicht sehr L/I-ang war! In Kalifornien, zwischen dem für mich faszinierenden Lernmilieu des LCHC und dessen Spiegel der 5th Dimension Site pendelnd, startete ich beobachtend, helfend, fragend, nachdenkend, zeichnend, lesend und schreibend den Datenerhebungsteil meiner Forschungsreise. Als Forschungsnovizin umgeben und unterstützt von brillianten Forschungsexperten. Die dabei sich entwickelnden Beziehungen mit all ihren 'ups and downs' spielen eine entscheidende Rolle beim dynamischen, oft unvorhersehbaren und von mir intuitiv geführten Forschungs-Prozess. Was will ich wann, warum und wie lernen? war eine Frage die ich mir täglich neu stellte. Dabei setzte ich mir keine sturen Zielvorgaben, sondern lernte allmählich in meine Forscherintuition und die Forschungsprozesse, gründend in der Langschen Perspektive, zu vertrauen.

Für die Extra Lang CD-Rom durchstöberte ich am externen Gedächtnis von Computer des LCHC weilend in Prof. Alfred Langs XMCA-Beiträgen der letzten sieben Jahre. Die elektronische Entdeckungsreise, wie das Stöbern auf dem Dachboden oder im Keller von vertrauten Menschen, weckte Erinnerungen an meine letzten sieben Semester an der Universität Bern. Eine Literaturanfrage von Scott Woodbridge im November 1993, welche bei Alfred Lang keine Antwort, sondern eine eigene Literaturanfrage erwirkte, zog meine Aufmerksamkeit auf sich. Inspiriert durch Scotts Anfrage nach "references on after school educational environments" erinnerte sich Alfred Lang an eine tiefgreifende Leseerfahrung in seiner Kindheit. Nie vergessen und seit über 50 Jahren sporadisch suchend, hoffte Alfred Lang, die Beschreibung seiner "unforgettable school" wiederzufinden, um mehr darüber zu lernen oder auch, um sie einfach nochmals lesen zu können. Längst vergessen, erinnerte ich mich am LCHC: Auch ich wurde einmal nach der Referenz dieser Schulbeschreibung gefragt. Es war im April 1997 im Schloss Münchenwiler, wo ich an einem äusserst fruchtbaren Gemeinschaftsseminar über "Innen-Leben und aussen-Welt. Mensch und Raum in Kunst, Literatur und Kulturwissenschaftlicher Sicht." für Dozenten und Studierende der philosophisch-historischen Fakultät, teilnehmen durfte. Professor Lang erzählte mir und andern bei einem Abendspa-

ziergang auf dem Weg vom nahegelegenen Dörfchen nach Schloss Münchenwiler von ungebrochenen Kindern und Jugendlichen, die in dieser "unvergesslichen Schule" in einem kleinen Dorf von Künstlern und Handwerkern lernten, in der Lernende von Lehrplänen, Lehrbüchern, Ferien- und Schulzeitregelungen, Stundentafeln, Jahrgangsklassen, Stützunterricht, Lernzwängen, Hausaufgaben, Prüfungen, Zeugnissen usw. befreit waren. Die Novizen durchlebten erst eine Phase des Nichtstuns bis Neugierde und der Wunsch, sich für etwas zu interessieren, geweckt wurde. Ich malte mir damals zuhörend ein buntes und komplexes Bild von dieser "unvergesslichen Schule". Hat es sie wirklich gegeben oder war sie Utopie? Am Schluss des XMCA Beitrages schreibt Lang: "But I couldn't forget it since. And certainly, I would like to have the power to arrange not only after school institutions and plain school settings but above all for an university organized after that model. Even if it were only to see what happens. But I am confident it would be great. If dreams are still the parents of realities..." Ein Traum wurde Realität! Ich verdanke den Professoren Alfred Lang und Mike Cole und den Forschenden am LCHC die Kreation einer "unvergesslichen Schule" auf universitärem Niveau! Für meinen Weg und mein Lernen selbst verantwortlich, aber im Team von Experten getragen und individuell unterstützt, erlebte ich im faszinierenden Lernmilieu des LCHC so etwas wie Langs "unforgettable school". Kein Lehrplan zwängte mein Lernen in einen von andern vorgegebenen Plan, da ich selbst das Was, Warum, Wieviel und Wie immer wieder neu bestimmte und den Gegebenheiten anpasste. Es gab Umwege, aber keine Leerläufe, da jeder Umweg nötig war, um die Abkürzung zu sehen. Das Handwerk oder den Beruf, den ich erlernte und immer noch lerne, ist Forschung. Den vielen Menschen, die dies möglich machten, bin ich äusserst dankbar. Es war eine grossartige Erfahrung!

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