

3 67044

INQUIRIES IN SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

Series editors

Kenneth J. Gergen and John Shotter

This series is designed to facilitate, across discipline and national boundaries, an emergent dialogue within the social sciences which many believe presages a major shift in the western intellectual tradition.

Including among its participants sociologists of science, psychologists, management and communications theorists, cyberneticists, ethnomethodologists, literary theorists, feminists and social historians, it is a dialogue which involves profound challenges to many existing ideas about, for example, the person, selfhood, scientific method and the nature of scientific and everyday knowledge.

It has also given voice to a range of new topics, such as the social construction of personal identities; the role of power in the social making of meanings; rhetoric and narrative in establishing sciences; the centrality of everyday activities; remembering and forgetting as socially constituted activities; reflexivity in method and theorizing. The common thread underlying all these topics is a concern with the processes by which human abilities, experiences, commonsense and scientific knowledge are both *produced in*, and *reproduce*, human communities.

Inquiries in Social Construction affords a vehicle for exploring this new consciousness, the problems raised and the implications for society.

Also in this series

Therapy as Social Construction
edited by Sheila McNamee and Kenneth J. Gergen

Psychology and Postmodernism
edited by Steinar Kvale

Constructing the Social
edited by Theodore Sarbin and John Kitsuse

CONVERSATIONAL REALITIES

Constructing Life through Language

JOHN SHOTTER



SAGE Publications
London • Thousand Oaks • New Delhi

Contents

© John Shoter 1993

First published 1993

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without permission in writing from the Publishers.



SAGE Publications Ltd
6 Bonhill Street
London EC2A 4PU

SAGE Publications Inc
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
32, M-Block Market
Greater Kailash - I
New Delhi 110 048

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

Shoter, John

Conversational Realities: Constructing Life Through Language. - (Inquiries in Social Construction Series)

I. Title II. Series 306.4

ISBN 0 8039 8932 6

ISBN 0 8039 8933 4 (pbk)

Library of Congress catalog card number 93-085177

Typeset by Megaron, Cardiff, Wales
Printed in Great Britain by Biddles Ltd, Guildford, Surrey

Preface and Acknowledgements	vi
Introduction: A Rhetorical-Responsive Version of Social Constructionism	1
PART I: A RHETORICAL-RESPONSIVE VERSION OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM	
1 The Conversational Background of Social Life: Beyond Representationalism	17
2 Situating Social Constructionism: Knowing 'from Within'	33
3 Dialogue and Rhetoric in the Construction of Social Relations	50
PART II: REALISM, THE IMAGINARY, AND A WORLD OF EVENTS	
4 The Limits of Realism	65
5 Social Life and the Imaginary	79
6 Linguistic Relativity in a World of Events	99
PART III: CONVERSATIONAL REALITIES	
7 In Search of a Past: Therapeutic Re-authoring	118
8 Real and Counterfeit Constructions in Interpersonal Relations	132
9 The Manager as a Practical Author: Conversations for Action	148
10 Rhetoric and the Recovery of Civil Society	160
Epilogue: Rhetorical-Responsive Social Constructionism in Summary Form	178
Afterword <i>Roy Bhaskar</i>	185
References	188
Index	197

Preface and Acknowledgements

Although the aim of this book is to give voice to many topics covered by the other books in this series on social constructionism, it also goes a step further: it attempts to describe crucial features of the conversational world or worlds within which we have our being. For conversation is not just *one* of our many activities in the world. On the contrary, we constitute both ourselves and our worlds in our conversational activity. For us they are foundational. They constitute the usually ignored background within which our lives are rooted. But they need not remain so. For, from within our conversational activities themselves, we can draw attention to certain of their crucially important features that would otherwise escape our notice. Thus, we can come to grasp aspects of their nature, *through* our talk itself, even when a vision of it as a whole, in theory, is denied us.

While the introduction and epilogue, and Chapters 1, 2 and 3 were written especially for this volume, other chapters were drawn from the following sources: Chapter 4: Underlabourers for science, or 'tool-makers' for society? *History of the Human Sciences*, 3: 443-57, 1990; Chapter 5: El papel de lo imaginario en la construcción de la vida social. In T. Ibanez (ed.) *El Conocimiento de la Realidad Social*. Barcelona. Sendai Ediciones, 1989; Chapter 6: Speaking practically: Whorf, the formative function of communication, and knowing of the third kind. In R. Rosnow and M. Georgoudi (eds) *Contextualism and Understanding in the Behavioural Sciences*. New York: Praeger, 1986; Chapter 7: Consultant re-authoring: the 'making' and 'finding' of narrative constructions. *Human Systems*, 2: 105-19, 1991; Chapter 8: Paper for the Don Bannister Memorial Conference: Metaphors in Life and Psychotherapy. London, Oct. 1988, Institute of Group Analysis; Chapter 9: The manager as author: a rhetorical responsive, social constructionist approach to social-organizational problems.: Paper read at Hochschule St. Gallen conference on *Social-Organizational Theory: From Methodological Individualism to Relational Formulations*, 1990; Chapter 10: Rhetoric and the recovery of civil society. *Economy and Society*, 18: 149-66, 1989. Permission to draw upon these articles from the publishers and editors of them is gratefully acknowledged. Although most of these essays have been worked over and elaborated for this book, repetitions have only been eradicated where sense permitted. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the help and warm friendship of my co-editor on this series, Kenneth J. Gergen.

Introduction: A Rhetorical-Responsive Version of Social Constructionism

The primary human reality is persons in conversation.

Harré, 1983: 58

Conversation flows on, the application and interpretation of words, and only in its course do words have their meaning.

Wittgenstein, 1981: no. 135

Conversation, understood widely enough, is the form of human transactions in general.

MacIntyre, 1981: 197

If we see knowing not as having an essence, to be described by scientists or philosophers, but rather as a right, by current standards, to believe, then we are well on the way to seeing *conversation* as the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood.

Rorty, 1980: 389

Our talk (and our writing) about talk is beginning to take a dialogical or a conversational turn. Instead of taking it for granted that we understand another person's speech simply by grasping the inner ideas they have supposedly put into their words, that picture of how we understand each other is coming to be seen as the exception rather than the rule. Most of the time, we realize, we do not fully understand what another person says. Indeed, in practice, shared understandings occur only occasionally, if they occur at all. And when they do, it is by people testing and checking each other's talk, by them questioning and challenging it, reformulating and elaborating it, and so on. For in practice, shared understandings are developed or negotiated between participants over a period of time, in the course of an ongoing conversation (Garfinkel, 1967). But if people are not simply putting their ideas into words, what are they usually doing in their talk? Primarily, it seems, they are *responding* to each other's utterances in an attempt to link their practical activities in with those of the others around them; and in these attempts at coordinating their activities, people are constructing one or another kind of social relationship (Mills, 1940). It is the character of these conversationally developed and developing relations, and the events occurring within them, that

are coming to be seen as of much greater importance than the shared ideas to which they might (or might not) give rise. For it is from within the dynamically sustained context of these actively constructed relations that what is talked about gets its meaning. Thus, instead of focusing immediately upon how individuals come to know the objects and entities in the world around them, we are becoming more interested in how people first develop and sustain certain ways of relating themselves to each other in their talk, and then, from within these ways of talking, make sense of their surroundings.

For, although our surroundings may stay materially the same at any one moment in time, how we make sense of them, what we select for attention or to act upon, how we connect those various events, dispersed in time and space, together and attribute significance to them, very much depends upon our use of language. In other words, instead of understanding our thoughts and ideas being presented to us as if *visually*, like we see bounded, material objects, in an instant, we are coming to talk of them as having more the quality of an extended sequence of commands or instructions as to how to act. Indeed, as I shall argue below, it is as if such commands or instructions are presented to us dialogically or conversationally by the *voice* of another, one who responds to each phase of our action by indicating to us a next feature to which we should attend (see Part I). Thus, instead of in visual and ocular metaphors, we are coming to make sense of our talk in terms of metaphors drawn from the realm of talk itself.

Linguistically constructed relationships and our disciplinary practices

We can perhaps see the importance of such linguistically constructed relationships if we begin by taking an extreme case: what happens at a certain moment in a relationship, when one person says to another, 'I love you.' Quite apart from its function as a statement of fact, such a statement can function (if appropriately responded to by the other) to reconstitute the whole character of the speaker's relation to the person to whom it is addressed. Indeed -- and this is especially important -- the changed relationship acts back upon the speaker to change the nature of the speaker too. For not only will the speaker now take on new duties (in exchange for new rights) regarding the person of the other, but what he or she will notice and care about in the other will also change: she or he will be changed in their moral sensibility, in their very being, in the kind of person they are. While the speaker was solely responsible for trying to initiate the 'creation' by the couple of a new form of their relationship, and in that sense, made the disclosure out of the blue, in another sense, the speaker will not have acted out of the

blue at all. They will have acted at a crucial moment in the changing context of their developing relationship. Usually, he or she will have noticed certain incipient tendencies in their relationship with and to the other: the other might have spent more than a usual time gazing at them, or is disconcerted by their presence, and so on. And they have decided that when in the right situation -- when in an appropriate interactive position in relation to the other, at the right interactive moment -- to risk making their declaration. For, unless the whole enterprise is bungled, its meaning, its unique meaning for those involved, will be apparent in the flow of activity in which it appears. The words 'I love you' will then draw their power -- to change the whole character of the future flow of essentially conversational activity between the partners -- very little from the words themselves. They merely function to make a crucial difference at a crucial moment, one that arises as a result of the history of its flow so far; their meaning is mostly in their use at that moment. But to use them thus, takes judgment; hence the speaker's feelings of apprehension and risk.

However, if managed well, the 'declaration of love' works to create a whole new kind of relationship with the other. Where, from within that new kind of relationship, a new kind of 'reality' becomes apparent -- for those in love which each other attach a quite different kind of significance to even small tendencies in each other's actions: the lover is enraptured by the loved one, finding them to be a source of 'ceaselessly unforeseen originality' (Barthes, 1983: 34). For being in love is more than just being friends. It is distinctive in that we feel suddenly seized by passions that wrench us out of the mundane flow of everyday life, we are transported into another, special reality, in which things happen in seemingly extraordinary ways. Thus, just as 'the world of the happy man is different from that of the unhappy man' (Wittgenstein, 1961: remark no. 6.43), so the world of those in love is different from those who are not: (i) they are in control of themselves (or not) in different ways; (ii) they expect different things of, notice different things in, and have different motives regarding, each other; (iii) they also use different ways of judging each other's worth. In other words, they are different in their ways of being. And it is against this new background, this new structure of feelings, that certain acts are judged by those involved as fitting or not. Thus, as a result of their declarations of love for each other (assuming the initial declaration to have been reciprocated), they will expect different things of each other in the future. If they take their utterances seriously and are concerned about their (moral) implications, they will not now expect, for instance, often to be left alone, while the other goes off with other friends, and so on. Indeed, speakers not honouring the moral commitments implicit in their avowals can be

shamed by being confronted with that fact by those to whom they addressed them.

While not perhaps so emotionally intense, nor quite so exclusive of others, many of our other activities in everyday life take place within the context of such conversationally developed relationships. Some are fleeting, others are more long term. Some are more open and disorderly than others; conversations among friends are less constrained than those in which we have to get some 'business' done; in some contexts – in offices, businesses, bureaucracies, educational establishments, etc. – knowing the order of talk required is a part of one's social competence as an adult. Indeed, so powerful is our talk in affecting our relations to others, that certain ways of talking take on an 'official' or 'sacrosanct' form, and one is sanctioned for talking 'against' them, so to speak. Thus Nietzsche's claim that 'God is dead' is still regarded in many quarters as shocking. And certainly in the United States of America, it is not a taken for granted aspect of the daily world to which one could appeal in opposing some of the social policies being implemented currently by state legislatures under the control of the Christian Right. Within such groups, strong feelings are aroused by talk that undermines the 'basic' ways of talking they use in relating themselves to each other. Talk that undermines the boundaries between our categories of things in the world, undermines 'us', the stability of the kind of beings we take ourselves to be and the shape of the desires, impulses, and urges we have; thus such talk is dangerous (Douglas, 1966). It is not easy to question or to change our 'basic' ways of talking.

In the West, in our everyday, practical talk about ourselves, we take a great number of things for granted. And in our traditional forms of inquiry into ourselves and the nature of our everyday social lives, in psychology and sociology, we have codified these 'basic' ways of talking into a number of explicit assumptions: for instance, we take it that we are self-contained individuals, having minds that contain 'inner mental representations' of possible 'outer' circumstances, set over against other such similar individuals, and against a social and natural background lacking such a cognitive ability (Sampson, 1985, 1988). Indeed, so 'ingrained' is this way of thinking about ourselves, that in our everyday conversations it is difficult for us intelligibly to talk about – and thus to imagine – ourselves in any other way. In fact, we hold each other to these forms of talk; to talk otherwise is considered a bit strange, it is as if one did not quite know what is involved in being a normal person. This is the source of our assumption that to understand something means 'having something like a picture of it in our heads'. And when, prior to the problem of attempting to explain it as a psychological process, we are faced with the problem of saying what understanding 'is', we say to ourselves, that is how it 'must' be – how

else could it be? Yet, as the anthropologist Geertz (1975: 49) remarks about this whole conception we have of ourselves, 'however incorrigible it may seem to us, [it is] a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures'. Other peoples seem to have developed very different ways of accounting for themselves to each other: as Lienhardt (1961: 149) reports for the Dinka, for instance, that they seem to have 'no such interior entity [as a 'mind'] to appear, on reflection, to stand between the experiencing self at any given moment and what is or has been an exterior influence upon the self'. Could it be that our talk of people as having *inner mental states*, and of them as always understanding things in terms of such states, is less universal than we think?

Yet, as we have seen, it is 'basic' for us. It arises out of a whole set of, to an extent interlocking, everyday practices in terms of which we live and make sense of our lives together. Thus, although new ways of talking can be proposed, unless a way of fitting them in with those already existing can be found, difficulties will be raised. In this regard, of particular interest to us as professional academics, are the disciplinary relationships we share with our professional colleagues. Although we have been used in the past to thinking of our disciplines as concerned with dispassionate knowledge, it is clear that this is only so in the centre of the discipline, so to speak. Those who operate there, who have passed their examinations well, who know not only how to draw upon certain already fixed meanings in an order of meanings but how to critically reject all those that do not fit, find an orderly, tranquil world with everything in its expected place. But as Foucault (1972: 223) points out, at the boundaries, as those on the margins of disciplines know to their cost, there are a whole range of *exclusionary practices* working to sustain the limited and orderly nature of its subject matter. 'Within its own limits, every discipline recognizes true and false propositions, but it repulses a whole teratology of learning.' And so it has been in the history of psychology (Danziger, 1990). Each new approach in psychology has had to struggle in from the margins to a place in the centre. For, to those who currently occupy the centre, new approaches can often seem like dangerous monsters on the prowl around outside the discipline, intent, if allowed in, upon destroying any order so far achieved within it. Thus, like friends posed on the brink of being lovers, can we (should we) risk shifting our disciplinary relations onto a new footing? While we might experience what we have never experienced before, we might also lose the basis of all the gains we have made so far. But also like the lovers above, perhaps the risk is not so great as feared. Perhaps we are only required to recognize what it is that we already doing in our relations to and with each other: to recognize and attend to ourselves at work where, before, we thought 'mechanisms' beyond our control must be.

What this book is about

In attempting to do this, to redirect our attention, we shall, as mentioned above, shift from a focus upon how we understand objects to how we understand each other – a shift from an interest in epistemology to one in practical hermeneutics (Shotter, 1984). And in focusing upon people's use of certain ways of talking to construct different kinds of social relationship, this book is concerned with a special dialogical or conversational version of *social constructionism* (Coulter, 1979, 1983, 1989; Gergen, 1982, 1985; Harré, 1983, 1986; Shotter, 1984, 1993b), one that I have called a rhetorical-responsive version. Why I have called it this, is because I want to claim that our ability as individuals to speak representationally – that is, to depict or describe a unique state of affairs (whether real or not), as we please, independently of the influences of our surroundings – arises out of us first and primarily speaking in a way that is *responsive* to the others around us. Indeed, a part of what we must learn in growing up, if we want to be perceived as speaking authoritatively about factual matters, is how to respond to the others around us should they challenge our claims. We must speak with an awareness of the possibility of such challenges, and be able to reply to them by justifying our claims. This is one of the reasons for calling it a *rhetorical* rather than a referential form of language: for more than merely claiming to depict a state of affairs, our ways of talking can 'move' people to action, or change their perceptions. And it can do this – and this is a second reason for calling it rhetorical – because rhetoric makes use of metaphors which can function to help an audience 'make connections' between a speaker's otherwise seemingly unconnected utterances, that is, to give intelligible linguistic form to otherwise merely sensed feelings or tendencies shared between speakers and their audience. This concern – with the social (and ethical) processes involved in the 'making' of such connections – characterizes all the chapters included in this volume. Rather than with language considered in terms of previously existing patterns or systems formed from 'already spoken words', the version of social constructionism explored here focuses upon the formative uses to which 'words in their speaking' are put, and upon the nature of the relational 'situations' thus created between those in communicative contact with each other in their speakings.

Thus, in shifting to a focus upon our conversational talk among ourselves, we direct our attention to a different set of factors in our human existence. Instead of focusing upon events within the inner dynamics of the individual psyche (subjectivism, romanticism, and cognitivism), or to events within the already determined characteristics of the external world (objectivism, modernism, and behaviourism) – the two polarities' in terms of which we have thought about ourselves in recent times

(Gergen, 1991; Taylor, 1989; Volosinov, 1973) – in social constructionism, we attend to events within the contingent flow of continuous communicative interaction between human beings. Concern in the past with one or the other of the two polarities above – as well as an Enlightenment urge to produce single, unified systems of knowledge – gave rise to an ambition to locate a world beyond the social and historical, and to attempt to discover this world, either in the depths of the supposed organic or psychic nature of the individual, or, perhaps, in larger abstract systems or principles to which the individual was supposedly subject. As a result, until recently, this third sphere of diffuse, sensuous or 'feelingful' activity, this unordered hurly-burly or bustle⁴ of everyday social life, has remained in the background, awaiting elucidation in terms of yet to be discovered, ahistorical principles of either mind or world. It is within this flow of responsive and relational activities and practices, I shall claim – a sphere of activity that elsewhere I have called 'joint action' (Shotter, 1984; described further in Chapter 1) – that all the other socially significant dimensions of interpersonal interaction, with their associated modes of subjective or objective being, originate and are formed.⁵

To view our cognitive abilities in this way – as being formed in what we do and say, rather than as being the already existing, well formed sources of our actions and utterances – is, as Harré (1992a) has recently put it, to contribute to a 'second cognitive revolution', one which takes a 'discursive turn' (for example, Edwards and Potter, 1992). While the first was publicly initiated at Harvard in the 1960s by J.S. Bruner and George Miller, and was very much in line (when now we examine it with hindsight) with the instrumental, individualistic, systematic, unitary, ahistorical, representational mainstream thought of the day, this second revolution has been a much more marginal development, taking place not only on the edges of psychology (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Coulter, 1979; Gergen, 1985; Harré, 1983, 1986; Shotter, 1975, 1984), but upon a number of other disciplinary boundaries also, particularly in literary theory and anthropology. It tends to foreground the poetic and rhetorical, the social and historical, the pluralistic, as well as the responsive and sensuous aspects of language use, all the concerns that were left in the background in the first cognitive revolution. But, as we shall see, in taking a dialogical, argumentative view of the growth of knowledge rather than an eliminative, Neo-Darwinian, monological stance, the previous concerns of cognitivism – the instrumental, the systematic, and so on – are not wholly eliminated or backgrounded, they still have a 'voice' in the dialogue. But now, not so loud as to silence the voice of these other concerns.

Until now, these other more responsive, more poetic aspects of language use have been, not so much 'silent', as (in the currently more prominent language of visual metaphors) 'invisible' to us. As modern, self-conscious, autonomous adults (and especially as scholars and academics), we are all very familiar with being able to use our language referentially and representationally to talk (or write) about 'things' and 'states of affairs' as we please – whether the 'things' in question are in the world or in our heads, whether they exist in fact or are merely fictional, whether anyone is there to hear (or read) us or not. As adult individuals, it has seemed to us that this referential–representational function of language is our language's primary function. But, in social constructionism, all of what we might call the *person–world*, *referential–representational*, *dimensions of interaction* at the moment available to us as individuals – all the familiar ways we already have of talking about ourselves, about our world(s), and about their possible relationships, which in the past we have taken as in some way primary – we now claim must be seen as secondary and derived, as emerging out of the everyday, conversational background to our lives. Where this dimension of interaction, to contrast with the more familiar representational dimension, may be called the *self–other*, *rhetorical–responsive*, *dimension of interaction*. This, then, is what is special to the version of social constructionism discussed in this book: the account of language offered is a communicational, conversational, or dialogical account, in which people's responsive understanding of each other is primary.

Clearly, in acting in this sensuous, responsive way, it might be argued that people are functioning at a lower, psychological level than when they act in ways not seemingly tied to their 'situation'. It could be argued that in adulthood, they leave this situationally responsive form of behaviour behind, and come to act individually and autonomously in terms now of their own inner mental representations. But even as adults acting all alone, people still face the task of making what they do relevant – if not to the immediate conversational situation in which they are placed – then to the social, cultural, historical, and political 'situation' they 'imagine' themselves to be in. And again, their task is responsively (and responsibly) to judge intelligently (and legitimately) how felicitously to fit their responses into the requirements of that situation. Where again, it is the joint activity between them and their socially (and linguistically) constituted situation that 'structures' what they do or say, not wholly they themselves. It is just as if we had to conform ourselves to an objective reality existing independently of any of the individuals involved: but we have to conform ourselves to it, not because of its material shape, but because we all require each other *morally* to conform to the 'situations' emerging into existence between

us. They exist as third entities, between us and the others around us. Thus, to us as individuals, such situations may seem like one or another kind of 'external' world, as something lying at the other end of the person–world dimension of interaction I mentioned above. However, such situations are not external to 'us' as a social group. As neither 'mine' nor 'yours', they constitute an Otherness that is 'ours', our own peculiar form of Otherness. And it is from within this Otherness⁶ that we must distinguish, slowly and gradually, between that which is due to our relations to each other, and that which is not: the task of distinguishing what is dependent upon features of our talk from what is independent of it. This will be a difficult and politically contested task; but it is clear that until now, it is a task that has been ignored.

As some will recognize, to speak in this way of 'others' and of 'Otherness' is to begin to use some of the vocabulary now appearing – but still in the form of 'theoretical monologues' (Billig et al. 1988: 149) – in postmodern and poststructuralist social theory. This is no accident. My aim, as indeed is the aim of this whole series of books, is to try to release psychology from its 'colonization' by an ahistorical, asocial, instrumental, individualistic 'cognitivism' (Still and Costall, 1991), and to open it up to a more large-scale, participatory or dialogical form of research activity. In such a form of research, instead of it consisting in just the 'theories' and 'systems' formulated by experts, pitted against each other in a Neo-Darwinian struggle for the survival of the fittest, we can begin to see how those within the whole socio-historical background context within which cognitivism itself is embedded – the conversational background which until now has been silent – can begin to take part in the dialogue too. What was an eliminative or exclusionary struggle for the single, systematic, correct 'view' (seeking a 'final solution'), becomes a continuous, non-eliminative, inclusionary, multi-voiced conversation, forming, in Billig's (1987) terms, a 'tradition of argumentation'. Where, at any one time, different argumentative traditions are held together as dynamic unities, not by being conducted within a shared framework, but (as Billig has also pointed out) by originating in, and being directed towards, the dialogical elaboration of certain two or more sided 'dilemmatic themes', 'topics', or 'commonplaces'. And, although no final solutions are ever reached in such traditions, what is important, is that those who win the arguments within them, get an opportunity to try to change the agenda of argumentation. In other words, what matters is not so much the conclusions arrived at as the terms within which arguments are conducted. For to talk in new ways, is to construct new forms of social relation, and, to construct new forms of social relation (of self–other relationships) is to construct new ways of being (of person–world relations) for ourselves.

And this, of course, is precisely what is at stake in this book. Quite explicitly, my purpose is to offer arguments for relocating or 're-grounding' the academic discipline of psychology within the formative social activities at work in the everyday, conversational background of our lives. Or, to put it in other words: to offer arguments for reformulating it in terms appropriate to the study of these activities. For – if the claims I have made so far are correct, and our ways of talking are formative of our social relations – then, new, more ethical and social ways of talking in psychology will work to 'reconstruct' it along more ethical and social lines, thus to establish within it a new 'tradition of argumentation'. Then, rather than the old eliminative and exclusionary struggles, we will be able to provide the opportunities for a whole new set of creative struggles of a quite different, non-eliminative, inclusionary kind to occur, struggles marked out by the tensions, not just, say, between simply mental representations and connectionism in cognitive psychology, but by a whole multitude of other tensions currently without a voice within the discipline. These tensions are present at all those points of uncertainty in our lives where we ourselves are responsible for the 'connections' we make: between ourselves and the others around us, as 'fellows', as 'strangers', as 'foreigners', as 'friends', etc.; between ourselves and 'our past', or 'our future', and 'our death'; 'our environment'; 'the unknown'; the 'transcendental or absolute'; and so on; and it is in our social construction of these connections that we construct our identities, the character of our desires – in short, who we are to ourselves. Psychology – with its insecurities and its struggles to prove itself as worthy of a place among the hard sciences – has incapacitated itself from participating in the crucial debates as to how these connections might be forged. Such debates are a part of that very two-way, socio-historical process of cultural development mentioned at the beginning of this introduction: in which what is at stake is the further articulation and/or transformation of our forms of life. Many have been disappointed in the past at psychology's absence from these debates. The aim of the studies in this book – and the other books in this series – is both to show that in fact we are only a step away from participating in such debates, and to provide some resources for the taking of that step.

The structure of this book

In Part I, I attempt to provide, not a theory of a rhetorical-responsive version of social constructionism, but an *instructive account* of it; that is, a whole tool-box full of 'instructive statements' or 'verbal resources' for use in accounting for, and for making sense of, our everyday conversational activities: joint action; knowing of a third kind ('from

within' conversational situations); 'rational-invisibility' and 'illusions of discourse'; rhetorical-responsive vs. referential-representational forms of talk; the emergence of referential forms from, and their 'rootedness' in, responsive forms of talk; the 'sensuous' nature of responsive forms of talk; the ethically negotiated nature of the outcomes of joint, conversational activity; the status of 'mind' and 'identity' as boundary phenomena, and as 'imaginary' entities; the open, incomplete, and negotiated nature of social life; our ways of talking (genres) as formative forms; making and inventing vs. finding and discovering; linguistic prostheses and indicators; and so on. Instead of a single, unified theory, I have gathered together an unsystematic assortment of 'conceptual prosthetics' *through which* to make sense of the background to our lives. As I have outlined in this Introduction, and argue further in Chapter 1, the task of understanding the *background* to our lives cannot be done within the confines of any kind of systematic *theory*. Systematic theories rely upon its taken for granted nature for their possibility and thus leave crucial aspects of it unanalysed; they result in a self-deceptive, externalizing of the ideology of the day (Rorty, 1980; see chapter 1 in this book). Indeed, as mental activities involve dialogical processes of *moral* testing and checking in the context in which they are conducted (Shotler, 1993a), this undermines (Enlightenment inspired) *systematic*, unsituated or decontextualized approaches to the study of 'mind'. Mental activity must be studied in some other way: as situated, practical-moral, joint activity.

But the nature of such activity is puzzling and strange to us; we are unused to speaking of the situations from within which we act as primarily intralinguistic realities; we are unused to accepting that we only make contact with those aspects of the world independent of ourselves, from within such realities, *through* the resources they provide. In an effort to show what their nature might be like *before* we manage to impose upon them an intelligible order, to capture the pluralistic, changeable, incomplete, contested nature of such (background) realities, I attempt in Chapter 2 to situate social constructionism in a world of activities and events (instead of our usual world of things and substances). And I argue that such conversational realities, and the dialogical traditions of argumentation contained within them, must embody a nonsystematic, two-sided form of knowledge – a so-called dilemmatic common sense (*sensus communis*) – that provides those living within them with a flexible, practical resource for use in their sustaining and 'development' of them. In Chapter 3, I explore the dialogical and rhetorical processes productive and reproductively of such a dilemmatic *sensus communis* and the traditions of argumentation it sustains, and go on to show something of what is

involved in moving towards conducting psychological research from within such a context, as a dialogical rather than as a monological enterprise. Also, I argue that founding it in a two-sided common sense provides sufficient of a shared basis, without predetermining the outcome of people's arguments, for them to know that they are at least all participating in the same argument – thus avoiding the charge that a social constructionist stance inevitably leads to just an 'anything goes' relativism. If it is situated, or 'rooted', in the conversational background of everyday life, then it is no more relativistic than any of the systematic frameworks formulated in the special sciences; neither their claims, nor those of social constructionists, can transcend the limits on our abilities to make sense, placed upon us by the traditions of argumentation made available to us in our history and culture.

In Part II, I examine realism, the imaginary, and the nature of a world of events. Those who still retain a nondialogical, nonrhetorical view of everyday knowledge, and still think of it as providing a monological, theoretical 'framework' for the interpretation of events, fear the supposed intrinsic relativism of social constructionism. As they see it, it fails to provide any way of making contact with a 'reality' beyond a framework of thought. Thus, many who endorse a social constructionist *theory* of social processes, still wish to endorse a 'realist' *methodology* (Bhaskar, 1989, 1991; Eagleton, 1991; Greenwood, 1989, 1992; Norris, 1990; Parker, 1992). But in all its varieties, realism is born out of an attempt to provide a principled, systematic solution ahead of time to a basic dilemma, the dilemma that arises, on the one hand, from knowing that simply saying cannot make it so, yet, on the other hand, from knowing that nonetheless we can do things with words. As Harré (1990: 304) now claims, the best resolution of this dilemma is a 'policy realism', in which 'we read theories not as sets of true or false statements but as guides to possible scientific acts. Manipulative practices can be successful or unsuccessful.' But politically, this gives rise to a new dilemma, a dilemma that can be rephrased as follows: (i) Does one attempt to resolve such dilemmas as this, ahead of time, by in principle, policy decisions from within a system of thought; if so, *whose* policy (theoretical system) should we accept, and on what 'grounds'? Or: (ii) Do we simply accept the existence of such dilemmas, and agree to resolve them whenever they appear in terms of local, contextual 'grounds', argued for as such by those concerned, and if so, what is the status of the grounds concerned? This, as I see it, is what is at issue in arguments over realism: *whose* 'basic' way of talking – theoreticians or (reflective) practitioners – is to dominate?

I opt for the second choice. As I see it, there are no pre-established orders of things in the world; what orders there are, are humanly

constructed and sustained ones. Thus in Chapter 4 in which I critically examine Bhaskar's influential account of 'scientific or critical realism' – I attempt to bring out some of the political issues involved in such claims as Bhaskar's: that there *are* in fact such pre-existing orders. There I raise questions to do with, for instance: (i) Should philosophers, psychologists, and/or social theorists be 'underlabourers for scientists', or should they be 'toolmakers for society at large'? And (ii) What is involved in elite groups resolving dilemmas theoretically, ahead of time, prior to their more disorderly resolution in more public arenas, in civil society?

In rejecting realism, I reject the idea that there are discoverable, indisputable 'foundations', or 'standards', or 'limits' in term of which claims to truth can be judged. Yet, I do not of course want to go so far as to say that, so long as one can tell a good story in its support, then just 'anything goes'. Again, the key to the resolution of this dilemma is to be found by situating it within a community. It then becomes that of distinguishing, from within the community, between what are 'real' possibilities and what are 'fictitious' possibilities for us, given who we are to ourselves culturally. In chapter 5, I explore this issue in terms of the concept of 'the imaginary'. The concept of the imaginary provides us with the resources we need to talk about those 'political' entities that are not yet wholly in existence, but that are not wholly fictitious either, in terms of which we organize and rhetorically sustain our social relations. Such political entities begin their existence by at first 'subsisting' only in people's talk of them, but – to the extent that new forms of talk tend to 'construct' new forms of social relation – they begin to take on more of a 'real' (morally intransigent) existence as talk 'of' them increases, and they give rise to new social institutions and structures. A process manifested in psychology, for instance, by the change from a behaviourist to a cognitivist psychology that began in the late 1950s and early 1960s; such processes of change are driven, not by new discoveries of the true empirical nature of things, but by people's changed interests. They only begin to go out of existence again as they cease to provide the kind of knowledge required to make sense of important social activities – as the individualistic, scientific forms of knowledge popular in the deregulated markets of the 1980s seem no longer to work in socially fragmented communities of the 1990s. In an attempt to grasp the nature of a world in which 'events' emerge into and go out of existence in different ways – a world very different from a world of continually existing objects – I examine in Chapter 6 Whorf's writings, and reintroduce his principle of linguistic relativity – and show how, as a victim of itself, it has been read and interpreted as merely a syntactic doctrine. In the reading I offer, it can be seen as offering a rich range of demonstrations useful to social con-

structionists, as to how ways of talking can work to construct forms of reality, and their interrelated forms of personhood, very different from our own.

Finally, after having provided in Part I a tool-box of rhetorical devices, and in Part II a general account of the contexts in which they might be applied, in Part III I want to study some of the results of their application in different particular spheres. The theme connecting all these studies, is to do with the difficulties arising out of individuals attempting to make sense of people's lives (including their own) from within an orderly framework. For people to pattern their lives according to a single pre-existing order, or for them to have their lives patterned for them in such a way, is to ignore the necessity for people always to respond to the actions of the others around them, in ways 'fitting' their own unique circumstances, according to their own unique use of the resources socially available to them. Whether the prior order is a systematic, mechanical order, or a much richer, nonsystematic narrative order, the case is the same; it is a prior order imposed upon them that does not allow them to sequence their own activities according to their own, unique situation. They feel 'entrapped', prevented from acting according to their needs. In Chapter 7, I examine the case of Ronald Fraser, an oral historian, who writes about his own entrapment in his own past. There, I examine responsive forms of communication at work in his psychoanalysis, in which 'feelings' rather than 'ideas' shape what is said. Fraser begins to escape from his imprisonment when he realizes that rather than a single, fixed story, his past consists in a collection of narrative resources, provided him by the persons around him during his childhood. Making use of them, he realizes that he can become the author of his own childhood, rather than merely the subject of it. The resources are there for him to use as he pleases.

Chapter 8 continues this theme: the possibility of becoming entrapped in stories of our own making. In particular, I discuss there the need that Freud felt in psychoanalysis, to construct coherent, causal narratives, narratives that would satisfy the 'scientific' need for orderly causal explanations. I call the constructions produced in such circumstances 'counterfeit' constructions, for although, like a counterfeit dollar bill or pound note these days, such constructions may convey a perfect 'sense of reality', they nonetheless work to appropriate a communal resource permanently for an individual purpose - that of imposing a pre-established order in favour of psychoanalytic experts. Further, I make it clear in this chapter that the production of an intelligible order in reflection, by the construction of a narrative account, quite often distorts what the character of the situation was in actual practice: it falsely completes what was an open

and unfinalized circumstance, whose very openness 'invited' and 'enabled' the action taken within it, as something finalized and complete. This connects also with the problems faced by managers in commerce and industry: they have the problem of clarifying what - in a unique, practical situation - the problem actually 'is'. It is pointless identifying it merely as one of a type, for that is utterly unrevealing of its unique details; yet it requires characterizing in a way which reveals how its details are interconnected, and also connected with its context. Thus in Chapter 9, I explore the character of conversations appropriate for making sense of 'those passing moments and details of things we call "circumstances"' (Vico). Metaphors are important rhetorical resources available to managers in formulating accounts of the problem circumstances facing them. Their task is one of practical authorship, to 'author' an account of a problem of such a kind, that the others in the company can identify points at which they can play a part in overcoming the company's difficulties.

The trouble with 'natural scientific' approaches is that in claiming to offer general theories, they claim ahead of time to be able to speak in debates, correctly, on behalf of all those they study. But in doing so, they silence them. They deny them their own voice, their opportunity to speak on the nature of their own unique circumstances. They deny them their citizenship in their society. If this is to change, what is required, it would seem, is the fashioning of something which does not currently exist - a new *civil society*, a whole 'social ecology' of interdependent regions and moments of social life within which *possible* ways forward into the future can be explored, discussed, and debated by those actually involved. For, as we have seen, in a social constructionist world, our future is not just a matter of prediction and control, but a matter of how those within it are involved in producing it. This theme is explored in the final chapter, Chapter 10. In particular, it is argued there that if I am to have a sense of belonging in a social reality, then it is not enough for me merely to have a 'place' within it; I must also myself be able to play an unrestrained part in constituting and sustaining it as my own kind of 'social reality', as not 'their' reality, but as of me and my kind, as 'our' reality. If I am unable to play such a part, then I will not sense myself as fully belonging to it; I *will* feel that I am living in a reality not my own, a reality that others have more right to than me. As I argue in Chapter 10, only a society with a proper 'civil society', in which everyone can participate in the constitution of its culture, can provide its citizens with a sense of its culture as being 'their' culture. Thus as a first step toward the construction of such a possibility, it is people's responsibility to sustain a certain 'civility' in their daily conversational lives with each other, a 'civility' that will enable the conversations and debates constitutive of the playful search

for such a culture – and this is what politically is at stake in the version of social constructionism offered in this book, for this is a seemingly pointless and unmotivated concern in our current market-individualism.

Notes

1. A good deal of emotion is associated, not so much with the use, as with the maintaining of our 'basic' ways of speaking in existence. It is encountered during those times when an attempt is made to change them in some way. Thus, as Foucault (1972: 216) points out, although speech may not seem to be a very powerful activity in itself 'the prohibitions surrounding it soon reveal its links with power and desirability . . . speech is not merely the medium which manifests – or dissembles – desire; it is also the object of desire. Similarly, historians have constantly impressed upon us that speech is no mere verbalization of conflicts and systems of domination, but that it is the very object of man's conflicts.'
2. To talk like this is, of course, to oversimplify, for these two polarities play into each other and borrow from each other to such an extent that all theories in psychology contain aspects of both tendencies.
3. Here I have in mind Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach, that 'the chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively' (Marx and Engels, 1977: 121).
4. 'Hurly-burly' and 'bustle' are terms used by Wittgenstein (1980, II: nos. 625, 626, 629) to characterize the indefiniteness of the background that determines our responses to what we experience, and against which we judge events in our everyday life.
5. It is interesting in this respect to note what Toulmin (1982: 64) has to say about the genealogy of the word 'consciousness': 'Etymologically, of course, the term "consciousness" is a knowledge word. This is evidenced by the Latin form, *-sci-*, in the middle of the word. But what are we to make of the prefix *con-* that precedes it? Look at the usage of the term in Roman Law, and the answer will be easy enough. Two or more agents who act jointly – having formed a common intention, framed a plan, and concerted their actions – are as a result *conscientes*. They act as they do knowing one another's plans: they act *jointly knowing*.'
6. As both Harré (1990) and I (Shotter, 1984) have remarked, following Uexküll (1957), we could talk here of the human *Umwelt*.

PART I

A RHETORICAL-RESPONSIVE VERSION OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

I

The Conversational Background of Social Life: Beyond Representationalism

The human sciences, when dealing with what is representation (in either conscious or unconscious form), find themselves treating as their object what is in fact their condition of possibility . . . They proceed from that which is given to representation to that which renders representation possible, but which is still representation . . . On the horizon of any human science, there is the project of bringing man's consciousness back to its real conditions, of restoring it to the contents and forms that brought it into being, and elude us within it . . .

Foucault, 1970: 364

One of the aims of formulating a rhetorical–responsive version of social constructionism corresponds with that mentioned above by Foucault: it can confront us with the 'real' socio-historical and socio-cultural conditions of our lives, those making the current nature of our consciousnesses possible – where, of course, in the view taken in this book, it is a part of what it is for these to be the 'real' conditions of our lives that all attempts to characterize them are, by their very nature, contested. If this is the case, we must cease thinking of the 'reality' within which we live as homogeneous, as everywhere the same for everyone. Different people in different positions at different moments will live in different realities. Thus we must begin to rethink it as being differentiated, as heterogeneous, as consisting in a set of different regions and moments, all with different properties to them. We can begin to think of social reality at large as a turbulent flow of continuous social activity, containing within it two basic kinds of activity: (i) a set of relatively stable centres of well ordered, self-reproducing activity, sustained by those within them being accountable to each other for their actions (Mills, 1940; Shotter, 1984) – but with the forms of

justification used being themselves open to contest (Billig, 1987; MacIntyre, 1981); (ii) with these diverse regions or moments of institutionalized order being separated from each other by zones of much more disorderly, unaccountable, chaotic activity. It is in these unaccountable, marginal regions – on the edge of chaos, away from the orderly centres of social life – that the events of interest to us occur.

In fact, as we move from a modern towards a postmodern world to confront the times in which we live, we begin to realize that our reality is often a much more disorderly, fragmented, and heterogeneous affair than we had previously thought.¹ Thus, (i) if uncertainty, vagueness, and ambiguity are *real* features of much of the world in which we live; and (ii) how we 'construct' or 'specify' these features further influences the nature of our own future lives together, then their contested nature comes as no surprise: for what is at stake, is which of a possible plurality of future next steps should we take for the best? Whose version points towards a best future for us?

Knowing of the third kind: Knowing 'from-within'

As I have already mentioned, it is a part of the rhetorical-responsive version of social constructionism canvassed here to argue that the importance of these contests inheres, not simply in their outcomes, but in the forms of talk in which they are conducted. For they are constitutive of different centres of institutionalized social life. Thus, an important change occurs, not simply when one or another side in an institution wins an argument, but when such an opportunity is used to change the style of future argumentation – that is, the permitted forms of talk within that institution. For instance, the move begun in the seventeenth century during the Enlightenment to talk less about our lives in religious and more in secular terms, less in terms of 'souls' and the 'human spirit' and more in terms of 'brains' and 'minds', less in terms of God's will and more in terms of natural mechanisms – was, and still is, just as important for the new ways of talking and the new forms of social relationship (and new forms of contest) it introduced, as for any of the particular conclusions so far reached. Indeed, within the sphere of our socio-psychological interests here, these new forms of talk are of prime importance to us. But not so much for what they have privileged as central, as for what they have attempted to prohibit, to exclude, or marginalize (Foucault, 1972). Thus in pursuing the project of restoring to consciousness an understanding of the conditions of its own possibility, I want to argue that present in the conversational background to our lives are many other forms of talk, with their own peculiar properties, currently without a 'voice' in the contests within this sphere. If they were to gain a voice, it could change our lives.

Indeed, it is one of the claims explored in this book that an important, special third kind of knowledge, embodied in the conversational background to our lives, has been 'unvoiced' in our socio-psychological debates so far: a special kind of knowledge – to do with how *to be* a person of this or that particular kind according to the culture into which one develops as a child – that does not have to be finalized or formalized in a set of proven theoretical statements before it can be applied. It is not theoretical knowledge (a 'knowing-that' in Ryle's (1949) terminology) for it is knowledge-in-practice, nor is it merely knowledge or a craft or skill ('knowing-how'), for it is joint knowledge, knowledge-held-in-common with others. It is a third kind of knowledge, *vi generis*, that cannot be reduced to either of the other two, the kind of knowledge one has *from within* a situation, a group, social institution, or society; it is what we might call a 'knowing-from'.² Bernstein (1983) has called it 'practical moral knowledge'.

Elsewhere, I have discussed the nature of this special third kind of knowledge extensively (Shotter, 1984, 1993b). This volume explores various of its implications in certain different spheres of psychology further, as well as other, more general implications of its nature. Specifically, these studies address the question of how it is that we come to experience ourselves, our world, and our language, in the particular ways that at the moment we do, and how we might come to talk about ourselves differently. Why, for instance, do we currently simply take it for granted that we each have minds within our heads, and that they work in terms of inner mental representations which resemble in some way the structure of the external world? Why do we feel that we live our social lives within certain independently existing social structures, and act within them as if according to rules? Why do we think that the best way to make sense of our lives and to act for the best is in terms of theoretical formulations provided us by experts (rather than in terms of more practical, everyday forms of knowledge)? And also, why do we feel that our language works primarily by us using it accurately to represent and to refer to things and states of affairs in the circumstances surrounding us, rather than by us using it to influence each other's and our own behaviour? In other words, why do we feel *impelled* or *compelled* to talk about ourselves as we do? What is it in the conversational background to our lives that shapes our passions, and leads us to talk about ourselves and our world as we do – thus to 'construct' all our social relations along individualistic and instrumental dimensions, and our psychology in terms only of mental representations – while preventing us from noticing the consequences of so doing?

Externalizing the ideology of the day

In this connection, Rorty (1980: 11) has argued that 'the attempt (which has defined traditional philosophy) to explicate "rationality" and "objectivity" in terms of conditions of accurate representation is a self-deceptive effort to externalize the normal discourse' of the day, and that, since the Greeks, philosophy's self-image has been dominated by this attempt' – where the normal discourse of the day represents, as we shall see, an ideology in the sense of being a way of talking that benefits a certain social group, or groups, over others. Thus, in calling the version of social constructionism displayed in the studies below a rhetorical-responsive version, I want to call attention to the fact that central to it is an attitude towards the nature of language which contrasts markedly with the 'normal discourse of the day' in this regard: the taken-for-granted nature of language as a referential-representational system or code of meaningful signs. That stance, it can be argued (Harris, 1980, 1981; Volosinov, 1973) – in which language is treated as a systematic object of thought, structured as if according to rules, or, as a system of differences – arose out the study of *already spoken words*, after all contest over their speaking has ceased.

By contrast, the studies in this book, display an interest in the contested activity of *words in their speaking*; that is, in the practicalities of their use as means or as 'tools' in effecting everyday communicative processes, and in particular, in their formative or 'shaping' function, and the 'resistances' they meet, in such processes.⁴ Thus the stance I take in all the following chapters, is that in an everyday process involving a myriad of spontaneous, responsive, practical, unselfconscious, but contested interactions, we unknowingly 'shape' or 'construct' between ourselves as already mentioned, not only a sense of our own identities, but also a sense of our own 'social worlds'. Or, to put it another way, that plane upon which we talk about what we think of as the orderly, accountable, self-evidently knowable and controllable characteristics of both ourselves (as autonomous individual persons) and our world, is constructed upon another, lower plane, in a set of unacknowledged and unintended, disorderly, conversational forms of interaction involving struggles between ourselves and others.

Historically, it is upon the more orderly, accountable plane – conducted in terms of certain 'basic' ways of talking – that we have attempted to construct and establish yet more orderly, or institutionalized ways of talking; that is, disciplinary discourses, supposedly 'rational' bodies of speech or writing. Where, in Foucault's terms, such discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (1972: 49); that is, form them as objects of rational contemplation and debate, thus to establish the modern

academic departments. While the modern academic disciplines – especially, the 'human sciences' (Foucault, 1970) – were founded as *disciplines* – that is, established and institutionalized as professions – in the optimism of the nineteenth century, the conditions making this possible were a product of the Enlightenment of the seventeenth century, and it will be useful here just to list what some of these conditions were. The very notion of being enlightened – simply stated as the attempt to live one's life in the light of reason – was that of people being self-determined by reason in the conduct of their own lives, rather than having their lives determined by others in authority over them.

Indeed, it was a movement in which a certain middle to upper class group – known as the *philosophes*, the first secular (and semi-professional) group of intellectuals powerful enough to challenge the clergy – questioned the legitimacy of the clergy's right to decree society's 'basic' ways of talking. New, secular ways of warranting claims to truth were fashioned (Gergen, 1989), ways that subverted the traditional authority of the priests. Central to these new ways were the following features: (i) the elaboration of a special 'analytic' way of 'seeing', based in observation, which, it was claimed, worked to reveal the hidden, systematic order of things underlying mere appearances; (ii) the idea of language as being a shared *code* closely linking words to things; (iii) the idea that the knowledge gained through this special form of observation could be symbolically formulated in terms of representations (which resembled in their form of order the order of that hidden reality); (iv) the idea of the world as already a mechanism, or an orderly system, whose principles of operation it was our task to discover; (v) the idea of individuals as containing wholly within themselves the resources required for the making of such discoveries; where (vi) the new forms of knowledge could be formed without drawing upon previous, historical or traditional forms of knowledge – thus we had, besides a lack of interest in history, the denigration of traditional knowledge, practical knowledge, and rhetoric as 'mere' rhetoric. They also held (as we now realize) a wholly inadequate view of society, as a mere, homogeneous aggregate of individuals – a view which made it possible for them to dream that if only we could arrive at an appropriate form of enlightened self-knowledge, then society itself could be controlled, through the prediction and control of the behaviour of individuals, and thus 'improved'.

It is against this background that, as Foucault (1970) points out, the 'human sciences' of sociology, psychology, and those disciplines concerned with the analysis of literature and mythology, emerged. For within these special disciplines, 'man' is not just

that living being with a peculiar form (a somewhat special physiology and an almost unique autonomy); he is that living being who, from within the life to which he entirely belongs and by which he is traversed in his whole being, constitutes representations by means of which he lives, and on the basis of which he possesses that strange capacity of being able to represent to himself precisely that life. (1970: 352).

Thus the subject matter of the human sciences is – as has finally become obvious from the emergence of *cognitive science*, with its concern with mental representations, as the central arena of current debate from out of the more heterogeneous arena of the *behavioural sciences* – not language itself as such, but a certain form of human being: that which is formed within a certain set of established discourses. Where the discourses in question, let it be said, are of an ideological nature, in that they were first formulated by the *philosophes* (as a group) according to their interests, interests that they hoped would be shared by everyone, but in the first instance, *their* interests nonetheless, an interest in the overthrow of history and traditions.

It is my purpose in the chapters below, of course, to question the norms that sustain these discourses in existence, to attempt to reveal their more disorderly, conversational origins, and to show how – in the transition from everyday conversation to the forming of discourse – ideological processes working to benefit certain groups over others were, and still are, at play.

Psychology as a moral not a natural science

Turning now to professional, academic psychology, we can begin by remarking that, in our 'official doctrines' (Ryle, 1949) it is thought 'natural', so to speak, to think of ourselves as possessing within ourselves something we call our 'mind' – an internal, secular organ of thought which mediates between us and the external reality surrounding us. And furthermore, it is also 'natural' to think that as such, our minds have their own discoverable, natural *principles of operation* which owe nothing either to history or to society for their nature. Thus, it is the task of a natural scientific psychology, of course, to discover what these principles are. Thus, within the ideology of the day, there is no necessity for professional psychologists to justify their projects or programmes of research; they appear to be 'obviously' of the correct form.

This conception of 'mind' is, however, I think, a myth: our talk of our minds leads us to experience ourselves as talking *about* our minds that is, to talking amongst ourselves as if our 'minds' exist as the real things underlying our behaviour. But, I claim, there is no such 'underlying reality' to be found, and the belief that there is has led

psychology into a number of dangerous mistakes. And in this introduction, I want to explore just one of them, the one which I think is the most central and the most dangerous: the failure to take account of the fact that in our everyday social life together, we do not find it easy to relate ourselves to each other in ways which are *both* intelligible (and legitimate), *and* which also are appropriate to 'our' (unique) circumstances; and the fact that on occasions at least, we nonetheless do succeed in doing so. Attention to the actual, empirical details of such transactions reveals a complex but uncertain process of testing and checking, of negotiating the form of the relationship in terms of a whole great range of, essentially, *ethical* issues – issues to do with judgments about matters of care, concern, and respect, about justice, entitlements, etc. For in our social lives together, the fact is, we all have a part to play in a *major corporate responsibility*: that of both maintaining in existence the communicative 'currency', so to speak, in terms of which we conduct all our social transactions, and, that of developing and updating it to cope with changes in our surroundings as they occur. This is what is involved in us maintaining a civility in our social lives together. For our ways and means of 'making sense' to (and with) one another have not been given us as a 'natural' endowment, nor do they simply of themselves endure; what is possible between us is what we (or our predecessors) have 'made' possible. It is this responsibility that modern psychology has ignored, and which has led it, mistakenly, to give professional support to the view 'that "I" can still be "me" without "you" ... a view which, as I shall show in the next chapter, renders most of our actual social life 'rationally-invisible'; that is, beyond rational discussion and debate.

Thus, against the claim that psychology is 'naturally' a biological science, requiring for its conduct the methods of the morally neutral natural sciences, I wish to differ, and to claim (see also Shotter, 1975, 1984, 1993b) that it is not a *natural* but a *moral* science, and that this gives it an entirely new character. The major change introduced is this: the abandoning of the attempt simply to *discover* our supposed 'natural' natures, and a turning to the study of how we actually do *treat* each other as being in everyday life, communicative activities – a change which leads us on to a concern with 'making', with processes of 'social construction' (Harré, 1979, 1983; Gergen, 1982, 1985; Shotter 1975, 1984, 1993b; Shotter and Gergen, 1989). What I want to do in the rest of this introduction, then, is to discuss two issues: (1) to explore why we are so attached to (in fact, 'entrapped' by) this myth of a 'naturally principled' mind, and other such similar myths to do with its supposed 'contents', such as 'ideas', 'intentions', 'desires', etc.; and (2) to explore the nature of an alternative assumption in terms of which to

orient psychological investigations, an alternative which gives just as much a place to our 'makings' as to our 'findings'.

Textual realities and the myths of mind

Why do we seem so 'fixated', so to speak, upon the idea that there *must* be, somewhere in everyone, a 'mind', working upon some already existing or 'natural' *systematic principles* that, with the appropriate methods, can be discovered? Similarly, why are we so passionately convinced that there must be a single, well-ordered 'reality' to be discovered underlying appearances, as well as an 'objective' viewpoint, in terms of which it can be characterized? There are, I think, at least two main reasons, both to do with our concern with *systems* inherited from the Enlightenment, already broached above. Let me discuss these reasons in turn.

Firstly: as I have already partially mentioned but must now elaborate, ever since the ancient Greeks, people in the West have believed that 'reality' is to be 'found behind appearances'. Thus, it has long been thought that a very special power resides in the nature of reflective or theoretical thought: it can penetrate through the surface forms of things and activities to grasp the nature of a deeper 'form of order', an underlying order from which all human thought and activity *must* in fact spring. Thus, society at large has accepted it as a legitimate task of a certain special group of people—called priests, then scholars, and now philosophers, scientists, or just intellectuals—to attempt to articulate the nature of this deeper order. But the problems they face are: Where is this special underlying order to be found? And, how is it to be made visible?

In the West, we first looked for this deeper order unsuccessfully in religious and metaphysical *systems*. But then, during the Enlightenment, having lost faith in 'the spirit of systems', we adopted in our investigations, says Cassirer (1951: vii), 'the systematizing spirit'. And this, I think, is still the project implicit in modern psychology that we have inherited from the Enlightenment: the task of 'discovering' a supposedly neutral set of underlying 'mental' principles upon which the rest of life *should*, rationally, be based. Few of us now, however, possess the intellectual or the moral confidence (passion) still to accept this brief in good faith. Yet, although we cannot entirely give up the belief that there must be *some* worth in the effort to think seriously about life's choices, we find it very difficult to devise alternatives: we keep finding ourselves as if 'entrapped' within an invisible maze, from which there is no escape—this is because, within our professional academic practices as they are currently conducted, as systematic enterprises conducted within logical frameworks, there isn't!

This brings me to the second of my two reasons why we find it so difficult to formulate intelligible, alternative accounts of ourselves: in fulfilling our responsibilities as competent and professional academics, we must write *systematic texts*; we run the risk of being accounted incompetent if we do not. Until recently, we have taken such texts for granted as a neutral means to use how we please. This, I now want to claim, is a mistake, and now we must study their influence. But why should a concern with the nature of the literary and rhetorical devices constituting the structure of a *systematic, decontextualized text* now be of such concern to scientific psychologists?

Because theorists, in attempting to represent the open, vague, and temporally changing nature of the world as closed, well-defined and orderly, make use of certain textual and rhetorical strategies to construct within their text a *closed set of intralinguistic references*. They have not, however, appreciated the nature of the social processes involved in this achievement. But the fact is, in moving from an ordinary conversational use of language to the construction of a systematic textual discourse, there is transition from a reliance on particular, practical and unique meanings, negotiated 'on the spot' with reference to the immediate context, to a reliance upon links with a certain body of *already determined* meanings—a body of special, interpretative resources into which the properly trained professional reader has been 'educated' in making sense of such texts. Being able to make reference to already determined meanings in such texts allows a decrease of reference within them to what 'is', and a consequent increase of reference to what 'might be'. But to be able to talk in this way, as a professional participant in a disciplinary discourse, one must develop *methods for warranting* in the course of one's talk, one's claims about what 'might be' as being what 'is'. It is by the use of such rhetorical devices as reference to 'special methods of investigation', 'objective evidence', 'special methods of proof', 'independent witnesses', etc.—that those with competence in such procedures can construct their statements as 'factual statements', and claim authority for them as revealing a special 'true' reality behind appearances, without any reference to the everyday context of their claims (see Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 48).

But this process can produce, and for us in the social sciences *does* produce, what Ossorio (1981) has called '*ex post facto* fact' fallacies: the fallacious retrospective claim that, for present events to be as they are, their causes *must* have been of a certain kind. Someone who has already studied the general nature of this fallacy in relation to scientific affairs is Fleck (1979). He comments upon its general nature as follows:

once a statement is published it constitutes part of the social forces which form concepts and create habits of thought. Together with all other

statements it determines 'what cannot be thought of in any other way' . . . There emerges a closed, harmonious system within which the logical origin of individual elements can no longer be traced. (Fleck, 1979: 37)

In attempting retrospectively to understand the origins and development (and the current movement) of our thought, we describe their nature within our, to an extent, now finished and systematic schematisms. But in doing so 'we can no longer express the previously incomplete thoughts with these now finished concepts' (Fleck, 1979: 80).

But the trouble is, once 'inside' such systems, it is extremely difficult to escape from them. We can, as Stolzenberg (1978) puts it, become 'entrapped' in the following sense: that 'an objective demonstration that certain of the beliefs are incorrect' can exist, but 'certain of the attitudes and habits of thought prevent this from being recognized' (Stolzenberg, 1978: 224). This, I think, is the trap within which we have ensnared ourselves in our systematic academic thought about ourselves and our psychology. But it means that our scientifically acquired knowledge of the world and ourselves is not determined by ours or the world's 'natures' to anything like the degree we have believed (and hoped) in the past; but instead, our knowledge is influenced by the 'ways', the literary and textual means, we have used in formulating our concerns. To go further: it means that we have spent our time researching into myths of our own making – the myths of 'mind', 'an already ordered reality', and 'objectivity' being cases in point. How can we escape from this entrapment? By studying how it is that we come to entrap ourselves in the first place, we must study the parts played rhetorically by such terms in our talk. For, far from talk of 'mind', 'an ordered reality', and 'objectivity' being in contrast to rhetoric, in my view, they are a part of it. This is why I think that it is important to study the actual, empirical nature of our ordinary, everyday, nonprofessional, nontextual, conversational ways and means of making sense together: for we are 'talked into' our supposed 'realities' by its means.

Events within conversational realities

As I have already mentioned above, the essence of textual communication is its so-called *intertextuality*: the fact that it draws upon people's knowledge of a certain body of *already formulated* meanings in the making of its meanings – this is why texts can be understood without contexts, that is, independently of immediate and local contexts. And it is also why, I think, experts can become trapped within systems of thought of their own making. But, as Garfinkel (1967) points out, in ordinary conversation people refuse to permit each other to understand what they are talking about in this way. A meaning

unique and appropriate to the situation and to the people in it is developed. But that is not easy to negotiate. Thus, what precisely is 'being talked about' in a conversation, as we all in fact know from our own experience, is often at many points in the conversation necessarily unclear; we *must* offer each other opportunities to contribute to the making of agreed meanings.

In such a process, only gradually does 'the matter talked about' develop. Indeed, as Garfinkel (1967: 40) puts it, it is a 'developed and developing event' within the course of action that produces it. Thus as such, it is only 'known by both parties [involved in its production]/*from within* this development . . . I cannot emphasize too strongly the deep and revolutionary or strange nature of what Garfinkel is claiming here: the nature of the 'reality' occupied by conversational events is at least as strange as any of the 'realities' discussed in modern physics. 'Making sense' of such an event from within a conversational reality, constructing a grasp of what is being 'talked about' from what is 'said', is not, according to Garfinkel, a simple 'one-pass' matter of an individual saying a sentence and a listener 'understanding' it. The events talked about are 'specifically vague'; that is, 'not only do they not frame a clearly restricted set of possible determinations but the depicted events include as their essentially intended and sanctioned features an accompanying "fringe" of determinations that are open with respect to internal relationships, relationships to other events, and relationships to retrospective and prospective possibilities' (Garfinkel, 1967: 40–1). Specifying or determining them sufficiently for the relevant practical purposes involves a complex back-and-forth process of negotiation both between speaker and hearer, and between what has already been said and what currently is being said, the making use of tests and assumptions, the use of both the present context and the waiting for something said later to make clear what was meant earlier, and the use of many other 'seen but unnoticed' (Garfinkel, 1967: 36) background features of everyday scenes.⁶

These strange temporal and spatial properties of conversational events, are in fact, Garfinkel claims, the properties of ordinary conversational talk. And as he says (1967: 41–2):

People require these properties of discourse as conditions under which they are themselves entitled and entitle others to claim that they know what they are talking about, and that what they are saying is understandable and ought to be understood. In short, they are seen but unnoticed presence is used to entitle persons to conduct their common conversational affairs without interference. Departures from such usages call forth immediate attempts to restore a right state of affairs.

We can thus begin to see why, when Garfinkel had his students try to talk to others as if single words should have already clear and

to be something to be explained, and becomes instead a rhetorical device, something we talk of at various different times for various different purposes. And what we require are ways of critically describing those purposes – where, a *critical* description is one alive to ideological biases inherent in the normal discourse of the day; that is, alive to the fact that we are not always correct in our theories as to why it is that we talk about ourselves as we do. Such a change, however, a change to a critical practical-descriptive approach, entails a change in what we take the *foundations* of our discipline to be.

As we know, our Cartesian tradition has it that our investigations must, if they are to be accounted intellectually respectable, possess foundations in explicitly stated, self-evidently true, propositional statements. And to deny this (as indeed Rorty (1980) has done) seems to open the door to an 'anything goes' chaos. It seems as if there is nothing at all in terms of which claims to knowledge can be judged. This, however, is simply not the case. For let me state again what seems to me to be the undeniable empirical fact which a natural scientific psychology has consistently ignored: the fact that our daily lives are not rooted in written texts or in contemplative reflection, but in oral encounter and reciprocal speech. In other words, we live our daily social lives within an ambience of conversation, discussion, argumentation, negotiation, criticism and justification; much of it to do with problems of intelligibility and the legitimization of claims to truth. Anybody wanting to deny it will immediately confront us with an empirical example of its truth. And it is this 'rooting' of all our activities in our involvements with those around us, which prevents an 'anything goes' chaos. But only if we possess a certain kind of *common sense*, a special kind of ethical sensibility acquired in the course of our growth from childhood to adulthood to do with sensing or feeling what they are trying to do in their actions, do we qualify for such an involvement. Lacking it, our right to act freely, our autonomous status, is denied us. This sense, these *feelings* (which are not properly called emotions) work as the 'standards' against which our more explicit formulations are judged for their adequacy and appropriateness. In fact, I want to claim along with Wittgenstein (1980, II: nos. 624–9) that:

We judge an action according to its background within human life. . . . The background is the bustle of life. And our concept points to something within this bustle. . . . Not what *one* man is doing now, but the whole hurly-burly, is the background against which we see an action, and it determines our judgment, our concepts, and our reactions.

Although, I hasten to add, that it does not determine them in an instant, nor is all the *possible* background bustle and hurly-burly of life present 'in' an instant either. The foundations of our lives never cease being contested.

determined meanings,⁷ it provoked a morally motivated anger in the student's victims. People felt that in some way their rights had been transgressed – and as Garfinkel shows, they had! In having other people's pre-established meanings imposed upon them, they had been deprived of their right to participate in the making of meanings relevant just to the situation they were in, to negotiate a properly *shared* outcome; they were unable to make a unique meaning appropriate to their own unique circumstances. Moral sanctions follow such transgressions, people feel aggrieved and attempt to sanction or 'punish' those who perpetrate them.

But if we take this view – that what is 'talked about' by us is developed from what is 'said' by *each* – what should we say about the nature of words and their meanings, if we are not to see them as having already determined meanings? Rather than *already* having a meaning, we perhaps should see the *use* of a word as a *means* (but only as *one* means among many others) in the social making of a meaning. To claim that they *must* already have a meaning of some kind, is yet again to ignore that special but unrecognized, third kind of knowledge to do with how we grasp 'what is being talked about' in a conversation in the course of all our talk 'about' it. Ignoring it leads us to ignore the unique and very special 'developmental' nature of such conversational situations or events *and* the rights of the people within them. Indeed, to insist words have pre-determined meanings is to attempt to rob people of their rights, both to participate in developing a conversational topic with others, and to their own individual way of making that contribution. But even more than this is involved: it is to deprive one's culture of those conversational occasions or events in which people's individuality is constituted and reproduced. It is also to substitute the authority of professional texts in warranting claims to truth (on the basis as we now see of the unwarranted claim that they give us access to an independent, extralinguistic reality), for the *good reasons* we ordinarily give one another in our more informal conversations and debates. But, if we cannot find the foundations we require for an academic psychology in the writings of philosophers, or the researches of our scientists, where can we find them?

The foundations of psychology: In principles of mind, or in everyday, conversational realities?

The move from a referential-representational view of language to a rhetorical-responsive view, entails also the move from a decontextualized concern with a theoretical-explanatory 'psychology of mind', to a 'situated' concern with a practical-descriptive 'psychology of socio-moral relations' I mentioned earlier. For 'mind', as such, ceases

But it is this claim – that the roots or foundations of our actions are to be found generally within ordinary people's everyday activities (including the uncompleted 'tendencies' to action they contain), and not within certain, already ordered principles of mind – that we professional academics have found, and still do find, difficult to stomach. For it means that anything we propose depends for its acceptance just as much (if not more) upon the common, collective, but 'disorderly', *embodied* sensibility of people in society at large, as upon the refined, systematic, and self-consciously formulated notions of academics and intellectuals. But what this means, is that in the growth of a noncognitive, non-Cartesian, rhetorical, social constructionist approach to psychology as a *moral science*, an obvious next step is a growing interest, not in the mind or the brain, but in the living body – or more correctly, in the unreflective bodily activities of the whole person. For paradoxical though it may be to say it, it is in sensuous bodily activities, I think, that ideas start, not in 'the mind'; such sensuous or feelingful activities are both the *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* of all our social constructions (Shotter, 1993b).

The rhetorical-responsive social constructionist stance I shall take, then, marks a radical departure from the 'analytic' aims of the Enlightenment: the dream of discovering the 'real', already existing, orderly principles underlying our behaviour, either in the 'minds' of individuals, or, in the 'rules' regulating a systematic, social order. In fact, the 'realist' rhetoric legitimating that project seems to authorize a way of talking 'about' certain 'entities', or 'structures' – such as 'the mind', or 'society', and other supposedly 'objectively real things' – when no such orderly 'things' or 'structures' as such may actually exist. Indeed, it makes no distinction between a people's 'social reality' understood, currently, in terms of who and what they are to themselves, as the inhabitants of a Western, liberal, individualistic, scientific culture – and the forms of 'reality' with which they might make contact, from within such social realities. Such a rhetoric makes it appear as if one's task is merely that of describing as accurately as possible how one has 'observed' the social world, or a person's mentality, to be. But this form of 'analysis' as such is only of use here if we all already know perfectly well what the orderly 'it' is, that is being analyzed. But in our talk about such contested concepts as 'minds' or 'subjectivities', or 'cultures', 'histories' or 'societies', etc., this is not the case. These are 'political or contested objects' whose function, very largely, is in the constitution of different forms of social relations. Thus, it is not surprising that different people have different 'views' as to what their supposed orderly nature *should* be, and express their views in the different 'images' they employ (Shotter, 1975). In the social constructionist view I am proposing here, such 'political objects' as

these exist only to the extent that they play a part within a conversation. That is, a 'tradition of argumentation' structured in their terms works to bring a certain form of human being into existence where 'to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life' (Wittgenstein, 1953: no. 19). In other words, *accounting* for ourselves by talk of such 'inner entities' as 'thoughts', 'motives', 'memories', and such like, allows us to structure and manage our *individualistic* forms of life, and to create certain forms of social institutions, not available to those lacking such a 'language of mind' (see Whorf on the native-American Hopi, in Chapter 6 below). This, indeed, is the nature of *our* 'social reality': we sustain and manage it through such forms of talk.

But when we academics treat ordinary people's everyday talk of their 'thoughts', 'memories', 'perceptions', 'motives', 'needs', and 'desires', and such, uncritically, as ordinary people themselves treat it – in short, as talk *about* their 'minds' – then we fail to take into account 'the contents and forms that brought it [such talk] into being' (Foucault, 1970: 364). In such talk, in a social constructionist view, people are not making a *reference* to the nature of their already existing minds, but are taking part in a contested (or at least contestable) process, a tradition of argumentation, in which they are still struggling over the constitution of their own mental make-up. At a personal level, the whole lexicon of 'mind' and 'mental activity' terms provides a set of rhetorical resources or devices for use by them to serve their own personal interests in that struggle; while at a social level, it is a way of talking that serves to sustain, and perhaps develop further, our own Western form of social life and personhood. If we want to change it, we must engage in argument, where, as Billig et al. (1988: 149) suggest, 'one of the goals of social action or of social reform is to win a present argument, in order to change the agenda of argumentation' – and this is the task in which, in contest with cognitivists, social constructionists are now engaged.

Notes

1. A fact, perhaps, reflected in the number of books about 'chaos theory' and similar matters (e.g., Bohm, 1985; Gleik, 1987; Peat, 1990; Prigogine and Stengers, 1984).
2. It is the kind of knowledge one has, not only *from within a social situation*, a group, or an institution, and which thus takes into account (and is accountable within) the social situation within which it is known. It is also knowledge that one has *from within oneself as a human being and as a socially competent member of a culture* – hence I know 'from the inside', so to speak, what it is like to be involved in conversation (see my chapter 2, epigraph quote from Garfinkel, 1967: 40). So, although I may not be able to reflectively contemplate the nature of that knowledge as an inner, mental representation, according to the questions asked, I can nonetheless call upon it as a practical resource in framing appropriate answers.

3. Below, what Rorty calls a 'normal discourse', i.e., a discourse which *dominates* our talk in the sense of providing the basic or the final unquestioned terms in which we make sense of things, I shall call a 'basic' way of talking.
4. The 'word is a two-sided act'. It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant . . . it is precisely the *product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*. Each and every word expresses the "one" in relation to the "other": I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view, ultimately from the point of view of the community to which I belong' (Volosinov, 1973: 86).
5. As Foucault (1972: 255) points out, a disciplinary discourse lays down ritual that those participating in it must observe: 'it lays down gestures to be made . . . it lays down the supposed, or imposed significance of the words used, their effect upon those to whom they are addressed, the limitations of their supposed validity.'
6. 'Demonstrably he [a speaker] is responsive to this background [in terms of various expectancies], while at the same time he is at a loss to tell us specifically of what the expectancies consist. When we ask him about them he has little or nothing to say' (Garfinkel, 1967: 36-7). As Garfinkel suggests, some of these expectancies will depend upon *prior* agreements and will be according to agreed practices or 'methods', but others, I claim, due to the intrinsic properties of joint action, will emerge out of the immediate and local practical circumstances of the conversation in question.
7. The idea that language works in terms of a set of pre-established, basic meanings, a code, has long been a commonplace of academic linguistics. Wittgenstein's (1956: 71) claim that 'the speaker and the listener have at their disposal more or less the same "filing cabinet of prefabricated representations"; the addresser of a verbal message prescribes one of these "preconceived possibilities"; and the addressee is supposed to make an identical choice from the same assembly . . . Thus the efficiency of a speech event demands the use of a common code by its participants.'

of GROSS

Linguistic Relativity in a World of Events

If you ask A to explain how he got B's agreement so readily [as to what he was referring to in his talk], he will simply repeat to you, with more or less elaboration or abbreviation, what he said to B. He has no notion of the process involved. The amazingly complex system of linguistic patterns and classifications, which A and B must have in common before they can adjust to each other at all, is all *background* to A and B.

Whorf, 1956: 211, my emphasis

In this chapter, I want to connect with some of the themes already explored in the previous chapter – to do with how we might talk about the only partially formed features of still developing social realities in a world of events and activities, rather than things and substances. But here, I want to do so from a slightly different perspective, one which explores more deeply the different formative powers of different ways of speaking, and the importance of Whorf's (1956) linguistic relativity thesis to these issues. Indeed, it seems to me that Whorf's work has been misunderstood in the past in at least these two ways: (i) as being to do only with what linguists would call 'logical grammar', and (ii) as being to do with *patterns* of already spoken words, rather than to do with the 'shaping' power of words in their speaking.¹ Indeed, this misreading of Whorf, is (it seems to me) itself a case in point of the very principle of linguistic relativity at work. We can (perhaps) see this, if we examine how he himself introduced its nature to a lay audience. He began by mentioning the revolutionary changes that have occurred in the world of science and the new ways of thinking they have introduced, and then went on to say:

I say new ways of THINKING² about facts, but a more nearly accurate statement would say new ways of TALKING about facts. It is this USE OF LANGUAGE UPON DATA that is central to scientific progress. Of course, we have to free ourselves from that vague innuendo of inferiority which clings to the word 'talk', as in the phrase 'just talk'; that false opposition which the English-speaking world likes to fancy between talk and action. (Whorf, 1956: 220, his emphases)

In fact, just as for Austin (1962) so also for Whorf: you can (actively) do things with words. It is this that seems to have been missed in past readings (and speakings) of Whorf. And it will be through an account

of the formative function of talk (that I shall elaborate below) that we will be able to 'see' (to use an inappropriate metaphor) Whorf's work in a new light.

In this connection, if we turn to more recent times, to Rorty's claim, in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1980: 12), that 'it is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions', we can see that claim also as a version of linguistic relativity. He is suggesting that, traditionally, our philosophical talk about mind and language has been shaped by a whole set of visual or specular metaphors, and that it is these metaphors, rather than the nature of our mental activities themselves, that have determined the forms and dimensions of what we feel it important to debate in our philosophical investigations. Where, 'the picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is that of the mind as a great mirror, containing various representations – some accurate, some not – and capable of being studied by pure, non-empirical methods. Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself' (Rorty, 1980: 12). If we want to change our philosophical 'views' (sic) of the world, 'we have to get the visual and in particular, the mirroring, metaphors out of our speech altogether' (Rorty, 1980: 371). Thus as Rorty sees it (says it) – and I have argued this also, especially in the previous chapter – intellectual progress is not a matter simply of winning *the* argument, but of changing the agenda of which academic, intellectual argument is conducted (Rorty, 1989). And this is, of course, precisely my aim here.

Here, as in previous chapters, I want to explore the implications of an account of language in which language is *not* primarily a device for 'picturing', 'depicting' or 'mirroring' (truthfully or otherwise) an already existing language-independent reality, but is primarily a formative device for *use* by people in coordinating their individual actions (Mills, 1940; Wittgenstein, 1953). Thus, rather than simply representing 'reality', speaking and writing should here again be 'seen as' (talked of as)³ 'giving', or 'lending' a form or structure to a state of affairs, situation, or circumstance appropriate to it having currency, so to speak, in the way of life in which the language is used. In other words, something which is only partially specified and thus open to further specification, is given further specification linguistically, *but only according to communicative requirements*; that is, only in a way that promotes, as Mills (1940) says, 'the coordination of diverse action, or, in Wittgenstein's (1953) terms, 'going on', in the living of a certain 'form of life'. Thus our ways of speaking and writing work *practically*, to formulate the topics of our discourse and to give them a

structure appropriate to our forms of life, which otherwise they would in themselves lack.

Covert grammar, rational-invisibility, and illusions of discourse

Such a view of linguistic functioning – of speaking and writing as not working by the use of already fixed codes simply to represent 'reality', but of them as being continuously creative or formative processes in which we construct the situation or context of our communication as *we communicate* – is, for us, to repeat, utterly revolutionary. As Harris (1980, 1981) points out, it calls in question one of the great myths of our time, a myth which since antiquity has been a part in one form or another of the Western tradition. In that myth, it is supposed that words stand for things either 'out there' in the world external to the language-user (in what Harris calls the 'reocentric' version of 'surrogationalism'), or (in its 'psychocentric' version) for things to be located internally, 'in the mind' of the language-user. And what I want to do in this chapter, through an examination of Whorf's (1956) work upon the languages of the American Indians, is to illustrate what it might be like *not* to think, or talk, in this way about ourselves. But to demonstrate how a quite different way of talking about ourselves in terms of events (or as Whorf says 'eventing') could lead to us experiencing ourselves in quite a different way. As a preliminary to this task, I want to do four things.

The first is to attempt to make clear that, when Whorf spoke of grammatical categories, he did not always mean what linguists now talk of as syntax, that is, recognizable patterns of already spoken words often he meant something quite different. He distinguished between what he called overt and covert grammatical categories – what he also called PHENOTYPES and CRYPTOTYPES – in the following manner. Overt grammatical categories, or phenotypes, are syntactically marked in some explicit, formal way within the sentence in which they appear, where their formal nature is determined by their place in the formal patterning of that sentence. Covert categories, or cryptotypes, are quite different. 'The class membership of the word is not apparent until there is a question of using it... then we find that this word belongs to a class of words requiring some sort of distinctive treatment... This distinctive treatment we may call the REACTANCE of the category' (1956: 89). He called such a category a CRYPTOTYPE because, as a 'hidden' category, 'they easily escape notice and may be hard to define, and yet may have a profound influence on linguistic behaviour' (1956: 92). For instance, 'names of countries and cities in English form a cryptotype with the reactance that they are not referred to by personal

pronouns as object of the prepositions "in, at, to, from". We can say "I live in Boston" but not "That's Boston - I live in it!" (1956: 92). Instead of 'in it' or 'at it' we say 'here' or 'there'. As I see it, this is what Wittgenstein (1953) would call an aspect of 'logical' grammar. And when he says 'grammar tells us what kind of object anything is' (1953: no. 373), it is by examining the *reactance* related to our talk of 'it', that we are able to make clear to ourselves what that 'it' is for us. That is a part (see Chapter 3) of Wittgenstein's method of doing philosophy. And this is the reason for my claim above: that to interpret Whorf's talk of grammar in a merely syntactic sense was an inadequate interpretation. The *reactance* occasioned by the use of a word only shows up in the context of its use, in its speaking.

Second: Following on from this, the account of language I have given thus far in this book represents our 'basic' ways of speaking as working 'instructively' - in their speaking - to invoke or provoke in us, as both responsible listeners or readers in a certain society, a creative process in which we determine what it is that is officially 'rationally-visible' to us (Garfinkel, 1967). Their *reactance* is such as to suggest that it is this, rather than that, kind of thing we are talking about. In other words, our 'accounting practices' work to 'instruct' us in how to 'see' an otherwise indeterminate flow of activity as having this, rather than that, kind of form to it (a form which otherwise it would not in itself have). Our 'seeing' is 'in-formed' by the terms in the dominant discourse of the day. But it is worth mentioning before we go any further, that by the same token, those self-same, official accounting practices will also work to render other aspects of what occurs 'rationally-invisible' to us.

To elaborate: in our everyday lives we are, as I have already said, embedded within a social order which, morally, we must continually reproduce in all the mundane activities we perform from our 'place', 'position', or status within it. Thus we must account for all our experiences in terms both intelligible and legitimate within it, and currently, we live in a social order that, officially, is both individualistic and scientific. Everything which occurs must be made sense of in its terms. It is because of this that we have concentrated far too much attention upon the isolated individual studied from the point of view of an uninvolved observer. And ironically, what has been rendered 'rationally-invisible' to us in us making sense of our world in this way, are the sense-making procedures made available to us in the social orders into which we have been socialized. These are procedures which, as I have said, have their provenance in the history of our culture, and in terms of which, as Garfinkel and the ethnomethodologists have shown, we perceive the flow of activity around us as 'visibly-rational'. We do not, however, see them as procedures which we ourselves

perform - as the epigraph quote from Whorf, above, illustrates - they are seen in other terms: as the operation of cognitive mechanisms 'in' individual people; as structures with their own dynamic which determine people's observed behaviour. It is in these terms too, that language appears not as a formative activity, but as a kind of logical calculus within individuals: indeed, it is impossible to 'see' language as formative in such terms. In this view, communication is simply a matter of A telling (transferring information) to B in his or her talk. Indeed, another aspect of the rational blindness induced in us by our current individualistic modes of accountability, is our failure to attribute sufficient significance to the second-person standpoint in life, to 'you's, to the 'involved' or 'participatory' standpoint in which what are thought to be 'I's meanings are perceived and understood as such; that is, from within the situation containing them both, the situation which third-person external observers are 'outside' of. It is only second-person listeners who have the right to expect first-person speakers to be as they present themselves as being (Goffman, 1959).⁴ Thus, unlike third-person outsiders, they present speakers with a context of enabling-constraints that they must *act into*, if listeners are morally to undertake the duty of attending only to what speakers intend them to attend to.

Third: An even more important phenomenon, perhaps, and certainly more bewildering, as we have already to an extent seen, is the imaginary entities our ways of speaking convince us exist. These are illusions which arise from *projecting* back into the phenomena of our concern, our methods of representing it - so that it appears to us as if we are simply 'mirroring' in the structure of our representations the structure of reality. This tendency leads us, as Goodman (1972: 24) says, to 'mistake features of discourse for features of the subject of discourse'. I have already discussed aspects of this problem in Chapter 5, but here I would like to take that discussion further.

Consider the following examples: (i) We speak of understanding as a 'mental process' and wonder what goes on in our heads which enables us to do it, and we set out to attempt to discover its nature. 'But', says Wittgenstein (1981: no. 446),

don't think of understanding as a 'mental process' at all. --For *that* is the way of speaking that is confusing you. Rather ask yourself: in what kind of case, under what circumstances do we say 'Now I can go on' ... That way of speaking [in terms of 'mental processes'] is what prevents us from seeing the facts without prejudice ... *That* is how it can come about that the means of representation produces something *imaginary*. So let us not think we *must* find a specific mental process, because the verb 'to understand' is there and because one says: Understanding is an activity of the mind.

The idea that there *must* be a process in our head arises, not from what we know about our own inner mental processes, but from the influences of our own ways of talking upon us.

Another obvious illusion is (ii) the feeling that every 'thing' must possess a fundamental, underlying, systematic structure, amenable to a single logical description – the true description of what the thing 'is'. But *is* there always such a structure there to be described? Goodman (1972: 30–1), in discussing 'the way the world is', argues not:

There are very many different equally true descriptions of the world . . . no one of these different descriptions is *exclusively* true, since the others are also true. None of them tells us *the way* the world is, but each of them tells us *a way* the world is.

For, not everything is a fully completed, objective thing; many 'things' are incomplete, and on the way to becoming something other than what they were when they were last observed – the world included. And what Goodman says of the world, Wittgenstein (1980, I: no. 257) says of things in general:

Mere description is so difficult because one believes that one needs to fill out the facts in order to understand them. It is as if one saw a screen with scattered colour-patches, and said: the way they are here, they are unintelligible; they only make sense when one completes them into a shape:—Whereas I want to say: Here *is* the whole. (If you complete it, you falsify it.)

Thus, as I have suggested before, it is in the very nature of our surrounding circumstances, that they can only be partially specified and lack a final specification, as to their actual structure.

Fourth: However, as an incomplete process, practical activity is still open to, or able to take on, or to be lent, further specification. It seems to 'invite' one or another kind of completion; and this, as Goodman and Wittgenstein suggest, *is* what often happens in our attempts to describe it: we describe an incomplete process by its supposed final product. William James (1890: 196) describes this tendency as 'the psychologist's fallacy':

The great snare of the psychologist is the *confusion of his own standpoint with that of the mental fact* about which he is making his report . . . Both it itself and its object are objects for him. Now when it is a *cognitive state* . . . he ordinarily has no other way of naming it than as the thought, percept, etc., *of that object*. He himself, meanwhile, knowing the self-same object in *his way*, gets easily led to suppose that the thought, which is *of it*, knows it in the same way in which he knows it, although this is very often far from being the case. The most fictitious puzzles have been introduced into our science by this means.

And this is my point here: unless we become sensitive to the manner in which our ways of speaking form and shape the topics of our discourse,

we shall often be investigating *fictions* of our own devising without recognizing them as such. Psychologists are attempting to discover how people *would* perceive the world *if it* was as they depict it to be: as if full of 'things' and 'substances'. But is it? In an attempt to answer this question, I would now like to turn to a study of Whorf's (1956) writings, and in particular what he had to say about a very different world from ours: the Hopi world of events, or 'venting'.

Metaphors we (English-speakers) live by

In his chapter on 'the relation of habitual thought and behaviour to language', Whorf (1956: 138) explores two questions: (1) Are our concepts of 'time', 'space' and 'matter' given in substantially the same form by experience to all men and women, or are they in part conditioned by the structure of particular languages? (2) Are there traceable affinities between (a) cultural and behavioural norms, and (b) large-scale linguistic patterns? To both questions, Whorf answers 'Yes'. Let me turn first to what he has to say about the use of nouns and noun phrases in talking about things in general.

The world of the Standard Average European (SAE) language⁵ is, Whorf claims, a world of matter or substances, of things, in general thought of as 'stuff'. We have two kinds of nouns for use in talking of such stuff: individual (or count) nouns and mass nouns. Individual nouns are used in speaking of bodies with definite outlines: 'a tree, a stick, a man, a hill', while mass nouns are used for homogeneous continua without implied boundaries. However, as Whorf points out, we perceive few natural occurrences in his way, as unbounded extents: 'air, water, rain, snow, rock, dirt, grass, and sea' perhaps, but the distinction is more widespread in language than in the observable appearance of things. For, in the context of their occurrence we perceive most such substances as possessing a definite outline. However, their outline can be different in different contexts. The mass noun has to be further individualized by the use of additional linguistic devices. This is partly done by the use of the names of *body-types*: 'stick of wood', 'piece of cloth', 'pane of glass' and so on; but also by introducing the names of *containers*: 'glass of water', 'bag of flour' and so on. These very common container formulae, in which 'of' has an obvious, visually perceptible meaning ('contents'), influence our feeling about the less obvious body-type formulae, says Whorf: 'sticks', 'pieces', 'panes', etc., seem to *contain* something, a 'stuff', 'substance', or 'matter' equivalent in some way to the 'water', 'flour', etc., in the container formulae. The formulae in both cases are similar: *formless item plus form*. Our ways of talking are such as to require us to talk of many things in terms of such a binomial structure; that is the only way

in which they can be 'given' or 'lent' an intelligible character. Hence, says Whorf, for SAE people, the philosophical ideas of 'substance' and 'matter' are instantly acceptable as common sense; they represent in general the ways in which we already talk in particular 'about our reality'.

Nowhere is the power of linguistic analogy in the creation of imaginary entities more apparent than in the creation, among the stuff and substances of our universe, of the formless stuff we call 'time'. Such terms as 'September', 'morning', 'noon' and 'sunset' are with us nouns, and they have little formal linguistic difference from other nouns, says Whorf. There is for us some 'thing' to which such phase-nouns, when we use them, seem to refer. In constructing it, we also apply here – in talking of 'a moment of time', 'a second of time', 'a year of time', etc. – the same linguistic formula of *formless item plus form*. We imagine that, just as 'a bottle' contains a quantity of liquid, so 'a summer' actually contains a quantity of time, marked out by 'beginning' and 'end' boundaries (which then puzzle us as to when exactly they occur). But in Hopi, all such phase terms, like 'morning', 'winter', etc., are not nouns at all but, says Whorf, a kind of adverb. Nor are these 'temporals' ever used as nouns, either as subjects or as objects. Thus they would not say, as we do, 'in the morning', but 'while morning-ing'. Indeed, as Whorf says, Hopi is a timeless language in the sense that, what we feel must be explicitly recognized as features of the passage of time, are not recognized as such in Hopi. Neither is there any 'thingifying' of time as a region, extent, or quantity: nothing is suggested about it in Hopi, says Whorf, other than the 'getting later' or 'lating' of it.

More recently, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have made many of the same points as Whorf about our English ways of talking: they have explored, as they put it, 'the metaphors we live by'. They also discuss *container-metaphors*, as well as what they call *orientational metaphors* (such as consciousness is UP; unconsciousness is DOWN), *structural metaphors* (such as TIME IS MONEY – Don't waste time) and ontological metaphors (such as THE MIND IS A MACHINE – My mind just isn't operating today). In discussing time, they point out that the major metaphor used is that of TIME PASSES US, which gives rise to the two subclasses of TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT and WE MOVE THROUGH TIME, such that it is not inconsistent for us to say both 'In the following weeks ... and 'In the weeks ahead of us ...' – which initially might seem to be contradictory, implying that the future is both behind and in front of us. Like Whorf's, their work also demonstrates the ineradicably metaphorical nature of *our* ways of talking.

The essence of metaphor is, they say (1980: 5), 'understanding one thing in terms of another' (my emphasis). There is, however, both a superficial and a deep sense in which this claim may be understood.

Superficially, it can be read simply as meaning a shifting or displacement of words from a supposed literal to a metaphorical context of usage: a form of words which already makes sense in one context is used to make a similar kind of sense in another. But they make a deeper claim, that 'metaphor is pervasive in everyday life. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature', they say (1980: 3). In other words, the otherwise utterly undifferentiated flow of activity in which we are involved is always given or lent an intelligible form linguistically, a form which enables one to perceive it as 'accountable'; that is, as an organization of 'commonplace events'. In this deeper sense, then, while there may be what one might call canonical or paradigmatic linguistic usages, there are no literal usages – if by literally speaking one means describing what is there independently of the shaping function of language.

Metonymical forms of talk

Is it the same for the Hopi? Not quite, Whorf claims. While full of figures of speech, of course, their language, he says, has neither the need for nor analogies upon which to build a concept of existence as a duality of *formless-matter plus things-with-forms* (that is, bodies and quasibodies made from, consisting of, or containing, the basic substances of the world). The general character of the Hopi cosmos is marked out by the use of verb or predicator forms (if 'verb' is the right term to use here in discussing a language not one's own), not by nouns and nominals. 'The Hopi microcosm', says Whorf (1956), 'seems to have analyzed reality largely in terms of EVENTS (or better "eventing"); and he goes on to describe the different natures of the "eventing" of events:

events are considered the expression of invisible intensity factors, on which depend their stability and persistence, or their fugitiveness and proclivities. It implies that existents do not 'become later and later' all in the same way, but some do so by growing like plants, some by diffusing and vanishing, some by a procession of metamorphoses, some by enduring in one shape till affected by violent forces. In the nature of each existent able to manifest as a definite whole is the power of its own mode of duration: its growth, decline, stability, cyclicity, or creativeness. Everything is thus already 'prepared' for by the way it now manifests by earlier phases, and by what will be later, partly has been, and partly is in the act of being so 'prepared' (1956: 147)

While 'planning for the future' is one of the central activities in *our* form of life, and is the activity towards which science is thought of as contributing, for the Hopi, Whorf claims, it is 'preparation'. Hopi preparation, however, is quite different from our planning. Both involve thinking. But we talk of our thinking as having to do with us

constructing or formulating – as a result of a means-end, cause-effect analysis – a plan (or theory, or set of principles, etc.) which we then have 'to put into practice' in some mysterious way. The mysterious hiatus between theory and practice arises for us because, given our ways of talking, 'matter' is only changed and fashioned by other matter impinging directly upon it, and it is quite unnatural for us to think of our thought as pervading and as being able to affect the world around us directly in any way. What is unnatural for the Hopi, however, is the thought that it does not! While our thought takes place in an *imaginary space* – 'in our minds', we say, 'somewhere privately within us', either 'in the forefront or the back of our minds' – the Hopi world has no such imaginary space. The corollary of this, as Whorf points out, is that thoughts and feelings to do with 'eventings' in the world are located there, out in the world in which the eventing takes place – as a natural part of the whole into which they are interwoven.

Thoughts and feelings are thus, for the Hopi, treated as directly connected to events in the world in some way: if one's thinking – about the health and growth of some plants, say – is good, then it will be good for the plants, if bad, then the reverse. But the kind of thought meant here is not 'theoretical' thought, the preliminary formulation of possibilities in imaginary space, but 'practical' thought, the invoking of the appropriate imagery, the thinking of oneself 'into' the context of the possibly required practical activities, the conducting of appropriate 'thought experiments', the attempt to increase one's awareness of what actually 'is', to rid oneself of goals irrelevant to the task in hand, and so on. That kind of thought power is, says Whorf, the force behind ceremonies, prayer sticks, ritual smoking, etc. 'The prayer pipe is regarded as an aid to "concentrating" (so said my informant). Its name, *na'travapi*, means "instrument of preparing".' (1956: 150).

Those who gather around to smoke the pipe before peace negotiations are already, in practice, halfway towards a more common, cooperative form of life. Such a form of activity – of working within a present situation, thus to accumulate within a part of it a sufficient influence to affect an aspect of the whole – is, we might say, metonymical: a part is taken as representative, or as invoking the whole. But if, as Whorf implies, everything is in some sense everywhere in the Hopi world, then it is entirely reasonable to hold that what one does in one part of a field of interwoven activities, ripples out, so to speak, and affects what happens in the totality. In metonymic ways of speaking, a feather invokes the bird, an eagle's feather all the eagle's qualities, such that to possess such a feather gives one access to all the eagle's qualities in some way; just as we, being speakers of English (SAE) and possessing some of the requisite linguistic skills feel we possess access to English as a whole.

Practically speaking

The importance of preparing activities to the Hopi are indicative, as Whorf makes clear, of their timeless notion of time. While we spatialize time in a three-tense system of past, present and future, they use only a two-tense system of earlier and later, a system which, as he suggests, seems to correspond better with the feeling of duration⁸ as it is experienced. For, conscious experience, even for us, does not obviously seem to contain a past, present, and future, but a complex unity: 'EVERYTHING is in consciousness, and everything in consciousness is, and is together', says Whorf (1956: 143–4). There is, however, a distinction in consciousness between that with which we are in immediate contact (what we are seeing, hearing, touching) – the 'present' – and what is not a part of our immediate circumstances. Within that second category we may distinguish between what we can remember – the 'past' – and what we can imagine, intuit, believe, or fancy – the 'future'. All these – what we are in contact with, remembering and imagining – are all in consciousness together. But whereas we order our conscious experience by talking of it in spatial terms, the Hopi make use of no such ordering devices; time for them enters into the above scheme by it all 'getting later' (or 'latering') together. Thus for them, everything which has ever been done is accumulated and carried over into the present event, while what it is becoming affects what it is also. It is, says Whorf, as if the return of the day was felt as the return of the same person (or group of persons, which in a sense, a practical sense, it is), not as 'another day' like the appearance of another and entirely different person.

All this implies that the answer to at least Whorf's first question, as to whether *our* concepts of 'time', 'space' and 'matter' are *not* given to all humankind in essentially the same form, is 'No'. The Hopi, in some sense, live in a space and time quite different from our space and time. Furthermore, whatever the space-time or time-space they do live in is, 'it seems to be furnished quite differently from ours. It seems to be full of activities in which they can (to an extent) participate, rather than of things external to them. Such a form of life appears quite incomprehensible to us; we cannot easily assimilate it to any already familiar, organized common sense scheme of understanding. Indeed, our difficulties with it are manifested, as Harris (1980: 18) says, in our modern theories of language, for they present

a revealing anatomy of the difficulties inherent in an essentially literate society's attempt to conceptualize something it has forgotten, and which it cannot recall from its cultural past: what an essentially non-written form of language is like.

But nonetheless, there are enclaves of understanding within our own 'reality' which appear to be very similar – as I shall illustrate in a

moment below. Yet we fail to notice this. Why? As Whorf points out, the major reason is that the philosophical views characteristic of Western thought – especially Cartesian mind-body dualism – receive massive support from the form plus substance dichotomy (indeed, as a case in point, body-mind dualism is still as prevalent as ever, especially in artificial intelligence research). While holistic, monistic, relativistic and contextualist views of reality, similar to those of the Hopi, have been formulated by philosophers and scientists, they remain incomprehensible in everyday life.

For a case in point, we can turn for a moment to mention the fate of the attempt by Pepper (1942) and others (such as Rosnow and Georgoudi, 1986) to canvass a movement in psychology called *Contextualism*. The 'root metaphor' of contextualism is, says Pepper (1942: 232), 'the historic event', where, just as in Whorf's account of Hopi, the contextualist does not mean by such a term 'primarily a past event' (if indeed there is such a 'thing' to which to refer). It means, he says, an event that is 'alive in its present', it is 'the event in its actuality ... when it is going on now' (1942: 232), and he continues in his writing to attempt to specify his meaning more exactly. However, we can feel the tension in his writing between his feeling that an 'event' is not a 'thing', and his need to write as if there is something (some 'thing'), already there that his writing is 'about'. For although, in giving instances of the contextualist root metaphor 'we should', he says, 'use only verbs', he himself continually slips back into the use of nouns and noun phrases, such as 'the ever changing event', rather than being prepared simply to say, for instance, that it is 'eventing' which concerns him. Why? Could it be that he feels such a new way of talking would not be accounted intelligible within the social institutions in which he wants to have his say? We shall find that it is as easy for Pepper to jump out of his language as to jump out of his skin, that his language speaks him more than he speaks it. And inextricably embedded in its nature is a certain metaphysics – of things and substances – making it very difficult for a way of talking based in verbs to be acceptable. Given the difficulty in grasping what it is that contextualists are talking 'about', it is not surprising that it shows little sign at the moment of 'catching on'. Why is this? It is not because such a view is refuted by the facts – ever 'refute' a way of speaking, for it determines what are to be 'accounted' as facts. Nor is it because, contrary to what often is claimed, they are counter-intuitive. While Newtonian notions of space, time and matter are often said to be intuitive, and relativity is cited as an example of how mathematical and scientific investigation can prove intuition wrong, is that actually what Einstein's discovery (invention?) of the theory of relativity proves? Laying the blame on intuition, says

Whorf, is wrong: 'Newtonian space, time, and matter are no intuitions. They are', he says, using a specially selected word (1956: 153, my emphasis), 'recepts from culture and language. That is where Newton got them.' In other words, as receipts (to give the dictionary definition of the word), they are mental images without an intellectual basis. What they represent as being 'in' the world is 'in' our way of representing it. They arose out of our current ways of speaking, and that is why – unlike the contextualist vocabulary of 'events in their going on now' – they were so easily accepted back into them.

As Whorf (1956: 152) says, if intuition is not to blame, the reason why relativistic and contextualist views find it so difficult to gain acceptance is that 'they must be talked about in what amounts to a new language' – one which, so to speak, seems to go against the grain of our current ways of talking. They require, apparently, a language of verbs, a vocabulary of activities; seemingly, we must talk in terms of 'eventing', etc., in an attempt to make a new kind of sense. But must we? Are our current ways of speaking really inadequate?

For Newton, space and time were *absolutes*, there independently of how one might talk about them or investigate them; they were not hypotheses ('Hypotheses non fingo'), nor were they terms to be used in constructing a frame of reference relative to events. In other words, the words 'space' and 'time' were taken as denoting 'its', existing independently of any activities or events taking place within them. But what if, along with Whorf, we now take 'space' and 'time' as belonging to us, so to speak, rather than to our world, and investigate them as involved in 'fashions of speaking', serving the social purpose of coordinating diverse action?

In everyday practical contexts of usage, rather than use such terms to represent absolute and abstract entities, we often say such things as: (1) 'There's no space in our relationship for such things', (2) 'I must make time for that', (3) 'He's spaced-out, man', (4) 'We've too much time on our hands', and so on. In other words, we use the words 'space' and 'time' in constituting actual and concrete features in and of the context in which they are used. We indicate by their usage, perhaps (to take the examples above in turn), that: (1) certain activities will invite sanctions; (2) that we're under pressure, that too much should not be expected of us, but we'll still try to do it; (3) that he's disorganized, that there is a lack of logical coherence in his behaviour and he is not to be relied upon; (4) we're bored, not engaged in anything interesting, so we're open to suggestions, and so on. How we live practically is not best described as taking place in a three-dimensional space of things in motion through a fourth space-like dimension, time, but in a 'time-space' of 'nonlocatable' regions and moments, offering us various invitations and prohibitions, etc., *relative to our current activity*.

It is difficult for us, however, not to assign places in space somewhere, in which we feel the 'things' we speak of are located. Yet as Wittgenstein (1981: nos. 486 and 497) says:

'I feel a great joy' - Where? that sounds like nonsense. And yet one does say 'I feel a joyful agitation in my breast'... But why is joy not localized? Is it because it is distributed all over the body? Even where the feeling that arouses joy is localized, joy is not... 'Where do you feel grief?' In the mind... What kind of consequences do we draw from the assignment of place? One does not speak of a bodily place of grief...

The answer will occur to us, he suggests (1980, I: no. 129) if we ask: 'But what does behaviour include here? Only the play of facial expression and gestures? Or also the surrounding, the occasion of the expression?' In other words, talk of place does not imply geographical localization, but is, in fact, of the circumstances surrounding our expression. For example, while we might say to someone 'The love I feel for you is in my heart', that is not where we should look for the import of their statement. In practice, its implications are 'in' the subsequent context between that person and oneself the statement helps to create. Such circumstances can be intelligibly described perfectly well in the ordinary language available to us currently. In other words, the establishing of a special language for the description of 'eventing' is not as necessary as Whorf thought. What then is required?

(Only, seemingly, the recognition and restoration to legal tender, so to speak, both of some currency we already possess, as well as the restoration of people's rights to coin more, as and when they require it. The establishing of these new ways of sense-making is difficult, not because they are contrary to fact, nor because they are counter-intuitive, nor because they require description in a wholly new language, but because they require the reconstruction of the official accounting practices (our 'basic' ways of talking) in terms of which we maintain our 'official' realities - our official forms of life. For it is these that currently rule ways of talking in terms of events and 'eventing' out of court.

Theories and accounts

What I have attempted to set out above, then, is an *account* of something to which currently we are somewhat rationally blind: namely, our own accounting practices, and the part played in them by the rhetorical and tropological functions of language in giving articulable form to otherwise unformulated feelings. Accounts are such that, in the context of their telling, they are 'self-specifying' in that they work to construct or to specify further that context or setting within which, and by use of which, their telling *makes* sense. The

rhetorical essence of an account is that in its telling it works practically to inform or to instruct recipients of it - to the extent that they accept it - as to how they *should* make sense of the circumstances around them. In other words, it informs them as to what kind of person they *should be*. Unlike theoretical statements, they do not usually need any explanation as to their meaning. Even if they prove unacceptable to those to whom they are offered, their import is understood.

As already mentioned, I have called the kind of knowledge required to be able to talk and to understand in this self-specifying way, knowing of the third kind: it is a knowing *from within* a discursively constructed situation, that is, from within an event. As such, it is a form of knowledge whose nature cannot be described theoretically, in ways amenable to evidential support. Even to try to do so would be paradoxical: for we want an account of it in practice, a contexted understanding of it from within the context of its use, and to assume that its nature could be described theoretically, would still be to assume that it could be described in a context-free way - hence my insistence that what I have provided here is an account of our accounting practices and not a theory of them. Thus it cannot be judged as to its truth or falsity, for it is not formulated so as to be amenable to evidential support; it can only be judged practically, as to whether it is instructive or not, and whether it 'accords' with the practice of the person giving the description' (Wittgenstein, 1980, I: no. 548), that is, 'it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game' (Wittgenstein, 1969, no. 204).

Because few are prepared to grant the importance of the above distinction between theories and accounts, and often claim that anything that guides empirical research must be 'a theory', let me set out the main differences between the two more explicitly below. Strictly, to be amenable to evidential support, theories ought to have the following properties: (1) explicitness; (2) abstractness; (3) discreteness; (4) systematicity; (5) completeness; and (6) be thus predicative. While few theories meet these conditions (and many argue, as I have said, that to insist on these conditions is to be over-fastidious as to what theories are), accounts have no such pretensions: (1) an account is not explicit but is open to interpretation; (2) it is not abstract but works by the use of examples (or paradigms); (3) its elements are not discrete but are context-dependent; (4) it is not systematic, for its elements are intentionally not rule-related to one another; (5) also its descriptions are incomplete; and (6) though it shapes our expectations, it is not predicative in any precise way. Only in the requirement that it be coherent and be understood as a whole, is it like theoretical talk; it cannot itself be grounded in evidence, for it works to shape what we will interpret as evidence.

Thus, being presented with a theory is quite different from being presented with an account. The categories provided by a theory can be used to reorganize one's perception of events; events that already make one kind of sense, can be seen as fitting into another, *already pre-established* framework of interpretation. But the sense in which one listens to or reads an account is quite different: if the facts it provides so far are unsatisfactory in some way – that is, incomplete, contradictory, or even bewildering – one waits for later facts and uses them in deciding the sense of earlier ones. What sense there is to be found is *not decided beforehand*, but is discovered or disclosed in the course of the exchange in which the account is offered. Thus, to give an adequate account of what something 'is', neither a *theory* nor a *model* of it will do. For we must not talk about it as really being something else, as requiring an unusual description in special *theoretical* terms. Nor must we talk about it as being *like* something else which, in other respects, is not actually like it at all. For both these ways – using theories or models – provide only partial, or biased, ways of 'seeing' it from the 'outside', from a standpoint unconcerned with the form of life from within which it is being observed. Our task – if an adequate understanding of something rather than its effective manipulation is at issue – is to 'see' what confronts us as 'what' actually it is within the form of life within which it has its being.

To give an account of something, to formulate practical knowledge of it as a topic, we must collect together in a certain kind of way what we *must already know*, in order to be the competent, autonomous members of our society we are. But to do this, we do not have to collect evidence as scientists; as presumably socially competent persons ourselves, we ourselves can be a *source* of such evidence (Cavell, 1969). Drawing upon the knowledge we already possess, what we need is an account of what we know about the topic in question, in the ordinary sense of the term 'account': as simply a narration of a circumstance or state of affairs. Something which in its telling 'moves' us this way and that through the current terrain of our practical knowing, so to speak, sufficient for us to gain a conceptual grasp of it – it is a view 'from the inside', much as we get to know the street plan of a city by living within it, rather than by seeing it all-at-once from an external standpoint. It is a grasp which allows us to 'see' all the different aspects of it as if arrayed within a 'landscape', all in relation to one another, from all the standpoints within it; it *narrates* a topic to us as a system of common 'places', as a whole given form by a set of topics or tropes.

That is: primarily vague, but not wholly unspecified states of affairs or processes, are specified further within a medium of communication, *according to the requirements of that medium*, which is the reproduction of the pattern of social relationships in which it has its currency. Thus

the features of what we represent in our forms of communication are more in our forms of communication than in what we represent by them; the basic nature of our language is formative or rhetorical rather than representative or referential. We have, Wittgenstein says, been held captive by a picture, the picture theory of language, which suggested to us that our language was not so much for communication as for representing in its structure the structure of the world. I have argued here the opposite: that we project into the phenomena of our concern features of our methods of representing it. It is our dominant mode of accountability which suggests to us a world of locatable, isolable, individual mobile entities in cause and effect relation to one another. Recognition of practical discourse would entail the recognition of the nonlocatability of many psychological phenomena. For example, as Wittgenstein (1980, I: nos. 903, 904 and 905) says about our attempts to centre our psychology 'in the 'minds' of individuals:

why should the *system* continue further in the direction of the centre? Why should this order not proceed, so to speak, out of chaos . . . It is thus perfectly possible that certain psychological phenomena *cannot* be investigated physiologically, because physiologically nothing corresponds to them . . . Why should there not be a psychological regularity to which no physiological regularity corresponds? If this upsets our concepts of causality then it is high time they were upset.

In other words, if we were able practically to accept the consequences of living in a world of events rather than of things, then we really would find ourselves in a world that is utterly strange to us, even though it would be the world of our own everyday, conversational life. And, instead of the 'mental states' we currently talk of as the *cause* of our behaviour, they would appear as one of its consequences.

Conclusions

Like Wittgenstein, Whorf forces us to see that the basic 'being' of our world is not as basic as we had thought; it can be thought of and talked of in other ways: as a world of activities and events, rather than of substances and things. Like Wittgenstein also, he does this through 'grammatical' studies that explore what is felt by native speakers to go with what – and, irrespective of whether his account of Hopi grammar is 'true' or not, like a good piece of science fiction writing, it enables us to imagine other ways in which we might make sense of our own forms of life. While currently we spatialize time and talk of it as a dimension of measurement, and think of ourselves as living somewhere upon that dimension 'in' an historically changing world, the Hopi (truly, or merely in Whorf's version) dynamize space and talk of it as space in which their thinkings and feelings are in responsive contact with the

influences at work in their surroundings. For us to think of ourselves in this way – as like a compass needle, thoughtlessly but sensitively registering changes in a surrounding magnetic field – goes against the grain of our thought about ourselves as the agents of our own actions; but we *can* think it, nonetheless. What goes against the grain for the Hopi, according to Whorf, is the opposite: the thought of themselves and their desires as separate from what goes on in their world. But no doubt in the Hopi world too, as in ours, there are two sides to the question; they could, no doubt, be provoked into 'thinking' (?) the opposite. But to repeat: while what we talk of as our 'thought' takes place in a special, inner, *imaginary space* – 'in our minds', we say – the Hopi 'world' contains no such inner, imaginary space. For them, as for the rhetorical-responsive version of social constructionism being outlined here, the supposed 'thinkings' and 'feelings' we talk of as having to do with the 'eventings' in our world, have to be located there, out in the world in which such talk takes place – as a part of the whole into which it is interwoven. To locate it in 'the mind' is to locate it in something imaginary rather than real.

By the same token, it is worth reminding ourselves of what Whorf said about the rhetorical-responsive power of language to create in us an incorrigible sense of the 'reality' in which we live, a 'reality' that aspects of which our 'mind' can 'intuit'. What we talk of as our 'intuitions' are, he said, *recepts* from culture and language. What our ways of talking represent as being 'in' the world are 'in' our way of representing it. They are 'rooted' in our current ways of speaking – whose primary function is the forming of different forms of life – and they work 'developmentally' to supplement, to specify or to articulate such ways of talking further. But it is also worth noting, that it is only in working outwards, from within such intralinguistically constituted 'realities', that we can make intelligible contact with that which is due to *other than* our receipts from language. And it is this possibility – of making contact with an otherness different from ourselves – that saves us from being wholly entrapped within intralinguistic realities of our own making. For, as we have seen, in dialogue with the others around them, different people can come to understand their differences. While such dialogues do not allow an instant, monologic, computational kind of understanding, they do allow the slow, back-and-forth development of a contested but negotiable practical understanding. Further, such contests and negotiations are not of an 'anything goes' kind; but neither are they are not grounded in any predetermined, outside, systematic standards. To repeat: they are 'rooted' in the developed and developing conversational contexts within which the practical negotiations take place. Thus, within a dialogical perspective, the problem of linguistic relativity takes on a quite different, nonvicious

character. The different ways of being in the world of different peoples, although not easy to interlink, are not for ever incommensurable.

This does not mean, however, that we are at last in a position to discover that final form of life that we all, as human beings, *should* live. For our task in the future is just as much a task of making as of finding. Each time we encounter a limitation upon our ways of knowing others (or ourselves) – as we did in revealing our entrapment by the traditional epistemological paradigm – we must try to identify it by contrasting our knowledge practices with alternatives, thus to respect the being of others (and ourselves) more effectively. And this is a process to which, of course, there is no foreseeable end, either in theory or practice. But distinguishing that which is due to our talk from that which is not becomes possible only if we can grasp the nature of our part in the construction of our own intralinguistic realities. And it is as an aid in this task that I think the value of Whorf's work lies.

Notes

1. I will both offer textual support for these claims, and more fully explain what I mean, later in the chapter.
2. Whorf characteristically capitalized words he wanted to be especially noticed.
3. This is the last time I shall self-consciously mark the importance of our vocabulary here. For, I cannot wholly purge my writing of visual metaphors; it would make my writing even more tortured, peculiar and multivoiced (i.e. full of qualifications and 'second thoughts'), than it already is. But nonetheless, readers should remain vigilant in noticing their pervasive presence.
4. Goffman talks of the context of self-presentation as having a *moral* nature, in terms of involving different rights and duties for speakers and listeners.
5. He lumps English, French, German, and other European languages all together in SAE (1956: 138).
6. 'Hopi', he says (1956: 216), 'may be called a timeless language. It recognizes psychological time, which is much like Bergson's "duration", but this "time" is quite unlike mathematical time. It, used by our physicists. Among the special properties of Hopi time are that it varies with each observer, does not permit of simultaneity, and has zero dimensions; i.e. it cannot be given a number greater than one [talked of as split into numbered parts].'

69025

Epilogue: Rhetorical-Responsive Social Constructionism in Summary Form

The notion of theory as a toolkit means: (i) The theory to be constructed is not a system but an instrument, a *logic* of the specificity of power relations and the struggles around them; (ii) That this investigation can only be carried out step by step on the basis of reflection (which will necessarily be historical in some of its aspects) on given situations.

Foucault, 1980: 145

The task consists of not – or no longer – treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.

Foucault, 1972: 49

In our reflective thought, upon the nature of ourselves and the world in which we live, we can either take what is invariant as its primary subject matter and treat change as problematic, or, activity and flux as primary and treat the achievement of stability as problematic. While almost all previous approaches to psychology and the other social sciences have taken the first of these stances, social constructionism takes the second. Thus, in this view, centres of stable social practice have to be sustained in existence by the efforts of those involved in them to 'regulate' and 'repair' them; they 'do not settle or endure out of their natural state' (Vico, 1968: para. 134). And it is only 'from within' such stabilized practices that we usually make our claims to knowledge. Social constructionists, however, are interested, not so much in what can be done from within such centres once in existence, as in the process of their construction in the first place. Hence their claim that, in general, our conversations do *not* take place in an already well-ordered reality, but in a pluralistic, only fragmentarily known, and only partially shared world (Rommelveit, 1985: 183)¹ in other words, they take a view from a position much more on the margins, or in the boundary zones, between the more settled, orderly institutional centres of social life, for it is here in these boundary regions that new constructions first emerge. This is the nature of joint action. Because of this, because our task is that of attempting to understand how, *practically*, we can promote this move from disorder to order from within that disorder

itself. I have argued that no orderly, systematic theories as such are possible. But what can be of help is, I have claimed, a rich 'tool-bag' of useful 'conceptual prosthetics', through which, perhaps, to see some of the processes in the movement from chaos to order at work. In such a context as this, it will be useful to end this book by gathering together in one place the doctrines and claims, a set of 'instructive statements', constituting the rhetorical-responsive version of social constructionism explored in it.

Social constructionism in general:

- 1 Common to all versions of social constructionism is the central assumption that – instead of the inner dynamics of the individual psyche (romanticism and subjectivism), or the already determined characteristics of the external world (modernism and objectivism) (Gergen, 1991; Taylor, 1989) – it is the contingent, really vague (that is, lacking any completely determinate character) flow of continuous communicative activity between human beings that we must study. Thus, the assumption of an already stable and well-formed reality 'behind appearances', full of 'things' identifiable independently of language, must be replaced by that of a vague, only partially specified, unstable world, open to further specification as a result of human, communicative activity.
- 2 Concern in the past with one or the other of the two polarities above – as well as an Enlightenment urge to produce single, unified, monologic², systems of knowledge – gave rise to an ambition to locate a world beyond the social and historical³ and to attempt to discover this world, in the depths either of the organic or the psyche, or, perhaps, in abstract principles or systems. As a result, this third sphere of activity has usually been left in the background.
- 3 It is *from within* this not wholly orderly flow of relational, background activities and practices (that is, with its historically already-specified-further-specifiability), constructionists maintain, that all our other socially significant dimensions of interaction – with each other and with our 'reality' – originate and are constructed in 'joint action' (see Chapter 1 and Shotter, 1980, for the properties of joint action).

The rhetorical-responsive version of social constructionism

Words, utterances, genres

- 4 Words as such lack any specific meanings in themselves; they are 'interindividual' (Bakhtin, 1986: 121); as a *means* for making

- differences within the developing developed context of a dialogue -- they work to *specify* meanings only within that dialogue.
- 5(a) As an intrinsic unit of dialogue, an utterance is always produced in *response to* previous utterances, and bounded by a change in speaking subjects; (b) further, utterances are not understood referentially, but also *responsively*, that is, not by listeners coming to possess the same ideas as speakers, but in terms of an answering response such as affirmation, disagreement, puzzlement, elaboration, application, etc. -- common understandings (that is, truly shared representations or references), in this view, are difficult to achieve.
- 6 Such responsive meanings are always first 'sensed' or 'felt' from within a conversation, that is, they are embodied as vague, unformulated 'intralinguistic tendencies', and as such, are always amenable to yet further responsive (sensible) 'development' or specification with the dialogue.
- 7 Utterances have their meaning within a *genre*, that is, within a way of speaking associated with a form of social life with a 'history'⁴ to it, such that certain words produce a 're-sensing', or 're-feeling' of past, authoritative usages; in Billig et al.'s (1988) terms, this is a 'living ideology': a way of speaking, thinking, perceiving, acting, and *evaluating* constitutive of a form of social relations, privileging some in the group over others.

Ideologies

- 8 It is in 'words in their speaking', in their tone and in other aspects of their 'temporal shaping', that utterances realize these ideological influences; thus, within the context of speaking, we are only interested in 'patterns or forms of already spoken words' (*formative forms*) to the extent that they provide the (enabling and constraining) *resources* constituting a genre -- it is the activity of speaking that is of primary interest to us, not what has been or was said.
- 9 Our 'official' ways of being, our 'selves', are produced in our 'official' ways of interrelating ourselves to each other-- these are the terms in which we are socially accountable in our society (Shotter, 1984) -- and these 'traditional' or 'basic' (dominant) ways of talking are productive of our 'traditional' or 'basic' psychological and social ontologies.
- 10 What we have in common with others in our society's traditions is not a set of agreements about meanings, beliefs or values, but a set of intrinsically two (or more) sided 'topics' [Gr. *topoi* = 'places'] or commonplaces, from out of which we may draw the two or more sides of an argument (Billig, 1987) -- plus (a political

- economy of) access to the resources of various genres, for use in the formulation of a 'position' in a dialogue (with a genre to it).
- 11 Often, dialogues take the form of arguments, and utterances the form of criticisms and justifications; living social traditions have this form (MacIntyre, 1981).

Descriptions and their grounds

- 12 Although *vague* and amenable to an indefinite number of descriptions, the only partially specified events in the social constructionist's open, unstable world, cannot allow or afford just *any* description; many are arguably false. They are not 'afforded' either by the events themselves, or by the background circumstances of our lives.
- 13 While a fictional narrative may be described as functioning to 'create' a structure, to articulate a wholly mental world, the structure 'given' to vague events by a claimed factual account must be *grounded* in the background circumstances; that is, logically, the events as seen from within the framework of the account, can be seen as corroborating or refuting it; and historically, the framework can be seen as having emerged from the background circumstances.
- 14 Such descriptions function to 'give' or to 'lend' a determinate *structure* to such open events which they do not in fact have, to *formulate* them definitely as being of this or that kind⁵.
- 15 In talk of such events, it is useful to introduce the concept of the imaginary, for we need to distinguish between whether our claims are based upon merely fictional possibilities, or upon genuine empirical possibilities, existing in the social background at the moment of our talk.
- Rhetoric and talk of 'psychological states'*
- 16 The way in which events are 'lent' their structure by the words in which they are described, brings to the fore the intrinsically *formative* or *shaping* function of language, its figures of speech (metaphors, metonyms, synecdoches and ironies, etc.); tropes are not something which can be added to or subtracted from a language as necessary, but are an intrinsic part of its nature (De Man, 1979).
- 17 Thus there is no way one can stand outside of our conversational forms of communication with others, or use another specialist (formal) language to criticize them: the same everyday linguistic resources, that afford the formulation of various claims, also afford their questioning, their doubting, their negation and their

- warranting – there is no such thing as a metalanguage that can replace our ordinary conversational forms of communication.
- 18 Neither are there any *extralinguistic* entities whose significance is linguistically clear prior to talk ‘about’ them; there are no extralinguistic ‘somethings’ in the world merely awaiting precise or accurate description (Rorty, 1980).
- 19 Thus psychological talk – supposedly ‘about’ our ‘perceptions’, ‘memories’, ‘motives’, ‘judgments’, etc. – does not refer to any already existing, inner reality of mental representations. It consists in formulations, in claimed versions of psychological states constructed on the basis of vague (but not wholly non-specific ‘feelings’), to serve rhetorical purposes in *accounting* for ourselves and others in response to challenges from those around us. Instead of ‘about’ our mental states, we should talk ‘of’ them.
- 20 The ‘grounds’, or the ‘standards’, in terms of which to judge whether such claimed versions should be taken seriously or not, within the argumentative or responsive context in which they are offered, are to be found (at the time of the requisite judgment) within the argumentative context itself, not outside it – as an outsider to the intralinguistic reality of another, however, one can make revealing comparisons between it and one’s own.
- 21 But there is no last word, whether inside or outside the time-space of dialogue, to bring dialogue to an end.
- 22 Given the practical, socio-relational nature of language, what matters in a tradition of argumentation, is the terms within which the arguments within it are conducted: to argue in relational rather than individualistic terms, is to attempt to interrelate ourselves to each other in a relational rather than an individualistic fashion, to begin to ‘socially construct’ a relational society.
- 23 The change from arguing about psychology in behaviourist terms to arguing about it in cognitive ones, has not brought argument in psychology to an end – but it has changed the whole style of what people now think it important to research into. The aim of social constructionist argumentation, is to bring about yet another change in psychology’s research agenda.
- The ‘basis’ and ‘function’ of social constructionist analyses*
- 24 What ‘social analysts’ have available to them as a ‘basis’ for their analyses, is a ‘sensibility’ of what is involved in ‘boundary crossings’, that is, in taking a marginal stance, they can ‘sense’ the changed intentionality⁶ involved in ‘moving’ from ‘membership’ (inclusion within a social group) to ‘exclusion’ (outside it) with respect to a group’s tradition of argumentation. All their claims,

- their formulations, must be such as to be ‘permitted’ or ‘afforded’ by such a ‘sense’. See Wittgenstein’s method of comparisons (Chapter 3).
- 25 Central to a rhetorical-responsive approach is ‘the fundamental plurality of unmerged consciousnesses’ (Bakhtin, 1984: 9); the fact that every way of speaking embodies a different evaluative stance, a different way of being or position in the world. It is this that keeps everyone in permanent dialogue with everyone else. It thus precludes the attempt to capture the nature of communicative activity ever in a unified, systematic theory.
- 26 But what it does allow us to do, is to display in our empirical investigations the dilemmatic character of the dialogues (Billig et al., 1988), and through the analytic unit of the utterance, to study the different ways in which different people, at different times, in different contexts, resolve the dilemmas they face in *practice* – with the result that, among the many other interesting features of what we can then claim their practices to be, we can construct reasons for our claims as to their ideological character.

What social constructionist analyses do not do

- 27 Provide accurate representations of an underlying reality.
- 28 Treat knowledge as consisting in static systems of forms, cognitive structures, or frameworks, and as defined in terms of their ordered contents.
- 29 Assume that social life consists in already pre-determined social structures.
- 30 Assume that psychological processes consist in already pre-determined cognitive processes in individuals.
- 31 Assume that language consists in a pre-determined code for linking inner psychological events to outer events in social life.
- 32 Separate, in this way, our talk from the conversational contexts in which it occurs and has its influence: upon our lives; upon who we are and become (our psychological make-up); and upon our social actions and thus upon the nature of our society and its culture.
- 33 Finally, in not claiming the provision of the one true view, it does not claim a privileged voice in the conversation of humankind; while it expects to be taken seriously, it expects only a voice in a critical dialogue with others.

Indeed, it is a part of the very notion of a rhetorical-responsive social constructionism, that all the claimed ‘instructional statements’ or ‘tools’ offered above may be contested. For it is a major part of the approach being canvassed here, as I have argued before, to suggest that an important aspect of such contests lies, not so much in their specific

outcomes, as in the vocabulary, in the forms of talk, in which they are conducted. The very terms which render some aspects of our lives rationally-visible to us, render other aspects rationally-invisible. And indeed, that has been the claim explored in this book: that a special form of practical-moral knowledge, embodied in the conversational background to our lives, has been rendered invisible to us, ironically, by the very 'visual' vocabulary in terms of which we currently conduct our investigations into our own nature. To grasp its nature, a more practical, historically or temporally oriented lexicon of nonvisual, speech communicational terms is required. And it is towards the fashioning of such a vocabulary that this book has been aimed.

Notes

1. Thus 'vagueness, ambiguity, and incompleteness - but hence also versatility, flexibility, and negotiability - must for that reason be dealt with as inherent and theoretically essential characteristics of ordinary language' (Rommetveit, 1985: 183).
2. The isolated, finished, monologic utterance, standing divorced from its verbal and actual context, is open only to a passive understanding which excludes an active response (Volosinov, 1973: 73). But in Bakhtin's (1984: 110) view, 'truth is not to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction'.
3. A 'sui generis fear of history, an ambition to locate a world beyond the social and the historical' is, as Volosinov (1976: 14) sees it, a basic motif in 'contemporary bourgeois philosophy'. As Rorty (1989: 189) says, what 'I have been urging in this book is that we try *not* to want something that stands beyond history and institutions'.
4. What that 'history' is, is of course always contested.
5. See in this connection, the 'ex post facto fallacy' (Chapter 5).
6. From within, we adopt various ways of looking, talking, evaluating, etc., unquestioningly, from the outside, however, we see that there are clear alternatives to these ways - and we ask, why aren't they adopted instead? The answer to that question is given in ideological terms.