Sociocultural studies of mind

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011–4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1995

First published 1995

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Sociocultural studies of mind / edited by James V. Wertsch, Pablo del Río, Amelia Alvarez.
p. cm. – (Learning in doing)
ISBN 0-521-47056-0 (hbk.). – ISBN 0-521-47643-7 (pbk.)
1. Ethnopsychology. 2. Social psychology. I. Wertsch, James V. II. Río, Pablo del. III. Alvarez, Amelia. IV. Series.
GN502.S65 1995
155.8 – dc20 94-34685
CIP

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-521-47056-0 Hardback
ISBN 0-521-47643-7 Paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2002

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Sociocultural studies: history, action, and mediation

James V. Wertsch, Pablo del Río, and Amelia Alvarez

Perhaps it is the fate of every generation to believe it experiences a period of crisis, or at least rapid social change. In the twentieth century alone, several events have been nominated as major crises with their attendant cultural and psychological dimensions. For example, Fussell (1975) has eloquently shown how World War I fundamentally changed poetry and literature along with the general worldview of the English, and Elder (1974) has documented the lasting psychological impact of the Great Depression on Americans. In both cases the focus is on the cultural and psychological dimensions of great social crises, and the assumption is that these dimensions are as central to understanding such events as are economic, political, or other dimensions.

Although armed conflict and economic deprivation remain an all too familiar part of the news today, we are fortunately not in the midst of a world war or a world depression. However, we are in the midst of other major social changes and crises. For example, instead of bringing the prosperity and tranquility expected by many, the end of the Cold War has unleashed a host of major social and political forces that are changing our lives in ways few had anticipated: The forces of globalization have accelerated in a variety of arenas such as finance, economic production, and communication, while simultaneously and somewhat paradoxically, new forces of localism, especially in the form of nation-

The authors wish to express their appreciation to Michael Cole and Julia Hough for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter. The writing of this chapter was assisted by a grant from the Spencer Foundation to the first author. The statements made and the views expressed are solely the responsibility of the authors.

alism, have emerged with their attendant and often brutal consequences. These sequelae of the Cold War were not generally anticipated. Indeed, many theories in the social sciences even imply that this paradoxical combination *could not* happen.

In the context of these unsettling and often tragic transformations, it is disheartening that the human sciences have seemed to contribute so little to understanding, let alone addressing, the issues at hand. Instead of dealing with such issues, it seems that a great deal of effort continues to be focused on answering narrowly defined questions that drive the discourse within the confines of a particular discipline or subdiscipline. There are certainly exceptions to this, reflecting either intellectually motivated attempts to escape the constraints of a particular discipline or the demands of funding agencies and foundations to address today's complex problems in an interdisciplinary way. These exceptions, however, are best understood as struggles against the dominant trend of academic discourse as usual with its narrow disciplinary focus and its resulting irrelevance to major social issues.

Even when there is a will, there often seems to be little way to address complex problems with today's human sciences. The contributors to this volume believe that this is not solely, or even primarily, the result of some unwillingness or perversity on the part of researchers in the human sciences. Instead, we see this largely as resulting from the use of inadequate or inappropriate "languages" for talking about these problems – specifically, theoretical and methodological languages that encourage or even force speakers to isolate various dimensions and issues in such a way that it is nearly impossible to communicate with one another or to formulate intelligent integrative pictures of complex phenomena. There are languages of psychology, anthropology, linguistics, history, sociology, and so forth, and it is usually extremely difficult if not impossible to translate the account of a phenomenon from one of these languages into another. Even more dismaying is the fact that there are many mutually untranslatable languages *within* any of these disciplinary categories. In psychology, for example, it is very difficult for a behaviorist to speak to a cognitivist or for either to speak to a psychoanalyst, and within each of *these* subdisciplines there are further incommensurable differences.

What we have to say in this volume will not solve all these issues. However, it is motivated, at least in part, by a desire to make the human

sciences more capable of addressing today's major social issues. And since these social issues come in complex forms rather than in presliced disciplinary fragments, we believe that a starting point for doing this is to find a common language that makes it possible to communicate effectively across artificially drawn academic boundaries.

This is not to say that everyone must speak only one language, something that would undoubtedly be detrimental to all (on the dangers of such an approach see Zinchenko, chapter 1, this volume). Instead of such a reductionistic, totalizing goal, we envision a kind of multilingualism with the caveat that one of the languages each of us uses should serve as a common tongue for communicating with at least some other parties, linking our various efforts together into a richer and a more general whole. This should not be mistaken as an attack on specialized expertise. We view such expertise as essential as long as there is a way for each specialization to be linked with others in a forum of common discourse.

A "sociocultural" approach

In this volume, proposals for how to address these problems are framed in terms of what we call a sociocultural approach. This is hardly the first time the term "sociocultural" has been used in the human sciences. Indeed, it has been employed by several authors from a variety of disciplines – for example, Dewey (1938), who used it when discussing issues of logic and inquiry, and Kress (1985), who has used it in his studies of language and discourse. In these cases, however, there has been no special significance attached to the term in the sense of designating an approach or method. One of the goals of this volume is to use this term to signify a general approach in the human sciences, hopefully one that can contribute to the development of the common language just mentioned.

At the risk of homogenizing some of the multivoicedness in this volume, we can begin by stating that the goal of a sociocultural approach is to explicate the relationships between human mental functioning, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional, and historical situations in which this functioning occurs, on the other. We shall come to modify this formulation, especially with regard to the place of "mental functioning" in it. However, the explicit mention of mental func-

tioning is appropriate at the outset because it reflects the fact that, to date, a great deal of writing that either has given rise to sociocultural research or has been explicitly labeled as such has been concerned with psychological issues. In particular, these efforts have been concerned with bringing psychology back into closer contact with other areas of the social sciences and humanities.

Historical antecedents

A search for the historical antecedents of sociocultural research can lead down many paths. At certain points these antecedents are thoroughly intertwined, but at many others they have evolved somewhat independently. We shall now review some of the historical precursors that we find particularly relevant for understanding the chapters in this volume.

The first antecedent to sociocultural research we shall outline is what Cole (1990) has called the "once and future discipline" of *cultural psychology*. In trying to situate this discipline in the academic landscape of the past and present, Cole writes:

> Cultural psychology is different from specialized branches of psychology in that it did not evolve as a subdiscipline after the founding of experimental psychology; the idea of cultural psychology predates experimental psychology and was present at its birth. (1990, p. 279)

One of the implications of Cole's formulation of cultural psychology is that it is not to be confused with, or reduced to, the subdiscipline of cross-cultural psychology. Instead, the origins of cultural psychology that he has in mind are to be found in Wundt's writings. It is, of course, possible to trace the roots of cultural psychology back several centuries as Jahoda (1993) has done, but Cole's point is that Wundt, the figure generally considered to be the "father of psychology," clearly saw a role for a version of cultural psychology that was on a par with other areas of the discipline oriented more toward the natural sciences. In recounting how the pieces to the overall picture emerged, Wundt wrote:

> In the year 1860 I conceived the idea of adding a kind of superstructure to experimental psychology, which by the nature of its aims and methods has to confine itself to the facts of individual mental life. Although this superstructure is bound to rest on

> the foundation of these facts, it has to go beyond them and take its departure from the phenomena of human social life. Soon this began to appear to me as the higher task of psychology, and truly its proper completion. (1920, p. 201, as cited in Jahoda, 1993, p. 133)

Wundt's definition of the nature and role of "Volkerpsychologie" is taken by many as one of the major precursors of today's efforts to create, or re-create, a cultural psychology.

Other contemporary formulations of cultural psychology do not mention Wundt but rely on a variety of ideas from other disciplines of the human sciences. For example, Shweder (1990) draws heavily on figures from anthropology, psychology, and psychological anthropology. His hope is that cultural psychology will "synthesize, or at least combine, some of the virtues" of such disciplines "while seeking to disencumber itself from their vices" (p. 17). The intended result will be a cultural psychology, which, among other things, will be "an interdisciplinary human science" (p. 3). As is often the case when talking about cultural psychology, it turns out to be easier to state what it is *not* than what it is, and in this vein Shweder notes that it is not general psychology, cross-cultural psychology, psychological anthropology, or ethnopsychology.

In yet another formulation of cultural psychology, Bruner (1990) sees it as being engaged in a much broader and more fundamental task than that of cross-cultural psychology. This is the task of attacking head on "a widely held and rather old-fashioned fallacy [about the relationship between biology and culture] that the human sciences inherited from the nineteenth century" (p. 20). Instead of viewing culture as some kind of " 'overlay' on biologically determined human nature" in which "the *causes* of human behavior were assumed to lie in that biological substrate," Bruner argues that we should take the perspective that "culture and the quest for meaning within culture are the proper causes of human action" (p. 20).

Although the formulations of cultural psychology we have reviewed share certain basic themes, they hardly present a unified picture. One indication of the differences involved is the failure of many of the authors mentioned to cite each other, or even common sources (on this, see Wertsch, 1992). At least part of this difference can be traced to the role played in the various contemporary accounts by a second major source of sociocultural research we shall examine: the writings of the Soviet psy-

chologist, semiotician, and pedagogical theorist Lev Semenovich Vygotsky and his followers. Bruner (1990) and Cole (1990) have drawn on the ideas of Vygotsky in formulating their accounts of cultural psychology, but it remains the case that many contemporary scholars concerned with cultural psychology cite nothing from the Vygotskian tradition, and those writing from the Vygotskian perspective often seem to know nothing of cultural psychology. This shortcoming is addressed to some degree in this volume, but many questions remain about how this has come about and whether it must remain so.

"Cultural-historical" versus "sociocultural"

Perhaps the first point to make about the Vygotskian foundations of a sociocultural approach is that Vygotsky himself seldom, if ever, used the term "sociocultural." Instead, he and his followers usually spoke of a "sociohistorical" (e.g., Luria, 1981) or "cultural-historical" (e.g., Smirnov, 1975) approach. If this is the case, why should we feel justified in appropriating many of his ideas under the heading of "sociocultural" research? As Cole (pp. 212–13 n1, this volume) notes this is a terminological issue worth considering seriously. He uses the term "socio-cultural-historical psychology" in the title of his chapter to index his concern and argues that to switch to the term "sociocultural" may do "a disservice to the historical record and fails to add conceptual clarity" to the discussion. The term used in his Chapter 8 is, therefore, "cultural-historical" or "cultural-historical activity theory." Zinchenko (Chapter 1) is the contributor to this volume who is most concerned with the history of these ideas in Soviet psychology, and he also uses the term "cultural-historical" psychology when referring to the schools of Vygotsky, Leont'ev, and Luria.

We would agree that "cultural-historical" and "sociohistorical" are more appropriate terms when referring to the *heritage* we recognize from Vygotsky, Leont'ev, Luria, and many other Soviet psychologists. However, we believe that "sociocultural" is a better term when it comes to dealing with how this heritage has been *appropriated* in contemporary debates in the human sciences, at least in the West. The reason for this has to do with how culture is understood by the various parties involved.

As dedicated participants in the effort to carry out the first grand

socialist experiment in the form of the Soviet Union, Vygotsky as well as his students and colleagues in the 1920s and 1930s were committed to formulating a psychology grounded in Marxism. To be sure, major divisions emerged over the years among those involved in this effort (see Zinchenko, Chapter 1, this volume). However, one of the fundamental tenets for all was a belief in some form of universal human rationality and progress. The rationality involved was viewed as being accessible to all humans, though some groups and individuals might lag behind others in their mastery of it.

Based on this assumption, Vygotsky and his colleagues made many distinctions within the "genetic domains" (Wertsch, 1985) of sociocultural history and ontogenesis between "higher" and "lower" forms of mental functioning. For example, with regard to sociocultural history, Vygotsky argued in *Studies on the History of Behavior: Ape, Primitive, and Child* (Vygotsky & Luria, 1993) that "cultural" peoples are distinct from "primitive" peoples in the forms of language and thinking they employ. This was not to say that primitive languages were viewed as simpler or less adequate in all ways. Indeed, in certain respects precisely the opposite was being argued:

> Primitive man differs from cultural man not simply because his language turns out to be more meager in means, cruder, and less developed than the language of a cultural man. All this, of course, is so; but at the same time, with respect to the language of primitive man, we are struck precisely by the huge wealth of vocabulary. All the difficulty of understanding and studying these languages first and foremost stems from their superiority over the languages of cultural peoples because of the degree of wealth, abundance, and luxury of their various nomenclatures, which is totally absent in our language. (1993, p. 108)

However, even while recognizing certain respects in which the languages of primitive people seem to be superior to those of "cultural man," Vygotsky viewed properties such as the "huge wealth of vocabulary" to be impediments to developing the "psychological tools," or "mediational means" (Wertsch, 1985) for higher mental functioning:

> The primitive man does not have concepts; abstract, generic names are completely alien to him. He uses the word differently than we do. . . . All the characteristics of primitive thinking can be reduced to this main fact, that is, to the fact that instead of [conceptual] notions, it operates with complexes. . . . The main progress in thought development affects a shift from the first mode of using a word as a proper name to the second mode, where the word is a sign of a complex, and finally to the third mode,

where a word is a tool or means for developing the concept. . . . the cultural development of thinking is found to have [a] close connection with the history of the development of human language. (pp. 118–121)

In making such claims about thinking and language, Vygotsky was making strong assumptions about universal human rationality and progress. "Primitive thinking" in general differs from modern forms in that the former does not rely on abstract concepts. Such abstract concepts are viewed as emerging at a later historical point. One of the results of this formulation is that what we would today call cross-cultural differences were for Vygotsky and his colleagues "cross-historical" differences (see Wertsch, 1985).

As Scribner (1985) pointed out, this does not mean that all of Vygotsky's comments on history can be neatly categorized in a monolithic way. On the one hand, it would seem that Vygotsky's understanding of history was very much in line with the Enlightenment idea of universal human progress, a view that interprets difference in terms of levels on a single line of development or evolution. On the other hand, however, Scribner (1985) noted that there are many points in Vygotsky's writings where he evidenced a wider set of ideas than might be anticipated. For example, he did not posit a single, globalizing set of stages of the sort outlined by Spencer (1876) for categorizing social formations.

Instead, Vygotsky seemed to recognize a complex relationship between history as change and history as universal human progress. This comes out in his account of the particular aspect of history that was of most interest to him, "the symbolic-communicative spheres of activity in which humans collectively produce new means for regulating their behavior" (Scribner, 1985, p. 123). Among other things, the fact that he seems to have recognized historical processes other than those that fall under the heading of universal human progress led him away from simple comparisons between historical development and ontogenesis and the resulting pitfalls of recapitulationism. Indeed, as Scribner noted, Vygotsky argued that "only 'sloth' would assimilate his theory to recapitulationist or parallelist positions" (1985, p. 138).

It is less clear, however, that all of Vygotsky's students and followers made such a distinction between history as change and history as universal human progress, something that may reflect the pressures of the different political contexts in which they lived and worked (see Zin-

chenko, Chapter 1, this volume). For example, the account provided by Luria (1976) of differences between the performance of Central Asian peasants and urban Europeans on various reasoning tasks would seem to be more consistent with the very kind of recapitulationist position that Vygotsky rejected.

The tendency to view history as universal human progress is linked with what Shweder (1991) terms "evolutionism":

> Confronted with the apparent diversity of human understandings, evolutionists rely on a powerful three-stage rule for ordering that variety into a sequence of lower to higher (primitive to advanced, incipient to elaborated) forms: (1) locate a normative model . . . ; (2) treat the normative model as the endpoint of development; (3) describe diverse beliefs and understandings as steps on an ideational Jacob's ladder moving progressively in the direction of the normative endpoint. . . . Variations in thought are ranked in terms of their degree of approximation to the endpoint. (pp. 117–118)

One of the problems with such a view has been outlined by Goody (1977). In his view, the approximation to the end point envisioned by evolutionists has often reflected an implicit dichotomy between "us" and "them." Goody sees this as emerging in anthropological literature in its use of dichotomies such as that between "savage" and "domesticated," or "Neolithic" and "modern" cultures. In Vygotsky's writings, versions of this dichotomy appear in the distinctions between "rudimentary" and "higher" mental functioning, or "eidetic" and "logical" memory, and his statement that "*he* [primitive man] uses the word differently than *we* do" (Vygotsky & Luria, 1993, p. 118; italics added) is particularly telling in this regard.

It was precisely a critique of evolutionism and the dichotomies that so often accompany it that gave rise to much of the thinking in contemporary cultural anthropology and cultural psychology. In contrast to grounding cultural and psychological analyses in assumptions about "psychic unity" (Jahoda, 1993) and the evolution thereof, figures such as Boas (1911, 1920) focused on the qualitative differences among cultures and argued that each has its own historical, psychological, and social configuration and must be understood in its own terms (see Lucy & Wertsch, 1987). The critique and ensuing theoretical framework outlined by Boas and such students of his as Sapir (1931) and Whorf (1956) provided the basic framework for much of today's cultural anthropology.

Our reason for going into these issues is to identify a basic incom-

patibility between assumptions that Vygotsky's followers (if not Vygotsky himself) held and those that guide the thinking of contemporary scholars concerned with culture, culture theory, cultural psychology, and so forth. Vygotsky's followers assumed a notion of culture that is clearly in line with universalist assumptions about the psychic unity of humankind and evolutionist claims often associated with these assumptions. Given that some of the most productive recent appropriations of Vygotsky have been made by scholars (e.g., Rogoff, Chapter 6, this volume) whose notion of culture derives from the tradition of Boas, some clarification is in order about where one agrees and disagrees with Vygotsky and his Soviet students and followers. It seems to us that the evolutionist assumptions indexed by the terms "sociohistorical" and "cultural-historical" are one place where most authors in this volume part ways with Vygotsky's followers, if not Vygotsky himself. It is for this reason that we prefer the term "sociocultural."

Having said all this about the problems associated with the ideas of Vygotsky and his followers, it might be assumed that sociocultural research is best formulated without invoking his name or ideas at all. This is clearly not the case for the authors included in this volume, however, and the reasons for this have to do with at least two fundamental themes running throughout sociocultural research that derive to a large extent from the writings of Vygotsky and his followers. The two themes we have in mind concern *human action* and *mediation*. Indeed, these two themes can be considered to be the defining moments of sociocultural research as presented in this volume.

Human action

One of the fundamental claims of sociocultural research as outlined herein is that its proper focus is human action. As understood here, action may be external as well as internal, and it may be carried out by groups, both small and large, or by individuals. The fact that the notion of action is applied as naturally to group as to individual processes means that it need not be constrained by the problematic assumptions of individualistic reductionism that limit so much of contemporary psychology (see Wertsch, 1991; Chapter 2, this volume).

Of course, this is not to say that action does not have a psychological moment or dimension. It clearly does. Even action in its most mundane

motor form has its psychological dimension. The point is that we should think of this as a *moment* of action rather than as a separate process that exists somehow in isolation. This is what motivated our comment in the preceding section that the preliminary formulation of a sociocultural approach, one that spoke of mental functioning, would need to be revisited. It could now read: The goal of a sociocultural approach is to explicate the relationships between human action, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional, and historical situations in which this action occurs, on the other.

The issue of action is explicitly addressed in a general way in the chapters by Bronckart and Wertsch. In his analysis, Bronckart argues that while there are several existing notions of action in psychological research, most of them fail to take into account the fact that "the structuring of human activity is of a *sociocultural* nature" (p. 76, this volume). Instead, "for a wide range of theoretical approaches, undoubtedly a majority, human activity is first and foremost an *externalization of the biological characteristics* of an organism" (p. 76, this volume), precisely the problem Bruner warned against in his comment cited earlier. Throughout Bronckart's analysis and in most other chapters of this volume as well, the emphasis on action reflects a rejection of the "mechanistic materialism" (Taylor, 1985) that has guided so much of psychology in the past and is a call to replace the study of what Kenneth Burke calls "sheer motion" (Gusfield, 1989, p. 53) with the study of meaningful human action. These are precisely the kinds of issues Bruner had in mind when he asserted that "a cultural psychology, almost by definition, will not be preoccupied with 'behavior' but with 'action,' its intentionally based counterpart" (1990, p. 19).

There are several theoretical traditions to which one can turn when formulating an account of action. In his Chapter 3, Bronckart notes the importance of figures such as Habermas, Ricoeur, and Weber. In an analogous way, Wertsch (Chapter 2, this volume) notes the importance of Dewey and Burke. For the majority of authors in this volume, however, the figures whose ideas about action play a particularly important role are Leont'ev (1959, 1975, 1981) and Vygotsky (1978, 1987). Zinchenko (Chapter 1, this volume) has provided what is perhaps the clearest exposition to date of the relationship between Leont'ev's and Vygotsky's ideas. In his exposition he argues that there are several complex interconnections between Leont'ev's "theory of activity" and

Vygotsky's "cultural-historical" psychology. He notes that while there are grounds for asserting that some of the roots of activity theory can be found in Vygotsky's writings, it seems on balance most appropriate to recognize important elements of evolution and differentiation that distinguish the writings of Leont'ev from those of Vygotsky.

Zinchenko argues that a search for the roots of activity theory in Vygotsky's writings is fraught with personal, political, and intellectual issues. However, there are two points of compatibility between Vygotsky's and Leont'ev's ideas that seem reasonably clear. First, even though Vygotsky did not explicitly formulate his ideas in terms of a theory of activity, his analyses of mental functioning, semiotic mediation, and other issues consistently focus on processes that have most if not all of the attributes of what later came to be called action by Leont'ev and others.

The very title of his last volume, *Thinking and Speech* (Myshlenie i Rech'), is a reflection of this. Vygotsky's focus throughout that volume was on the emerging interfunctional relationships between speaking and thinking as one example of a kind of action dynamic that characterizes the development of consciousness more generally (see Lee, 1985; Wertsch, 1985). The essential point for our purposes is that in all cases the formulations of "functions" (e.g., speaking, thinking, remembering) are inherently compatible with notions of action that later became the focus of research in Soviet psychology. As an example of this, consider the fact that the linguist and psychologist A. A. Leont'ev (1965) interpreted several of Vygotsky's claims about speech in terms of "speech activity."

The fact that *myshlenie* (thinking) and *rech'* (speech, or speaking) have sometimes been mistranslated into English as "thought" and "language," respectively, has served to obscure the action orientation in Vygotsky's writings. For him, speech is a *process, if not a form of action,* that uses language as a *means.* Language, as distinct from speech, is a semiotic means that certainly has the power to shape speaking and thinking, as several authors in this volume argue, but it is not itself a form of action in Vygotsky's terminology. The distinction Vygotsky was using has parallels in the philosophy of language, where distinctions such as that between "utterance" and "sentence" are commonplace.

Vygotsky's tendency to focus on speech, as opposed to language, reflects the general orientation of his Russian colleagues of the time.

For example, Bakhtin (1986) not only distinguished language from speech and sentence from utterance; he privileged the notion of utterance to the degree that he viewed the study of it ("metalinguistics") as having a kind of primacy over linguistics.

The second point we would make with regard to Vygotsky and a notion of action goes beyond potential compatibilities others may see between his formulation of functions and other processes, on the one hand, and action, on the other. It concerns concrete reinterpretations of his claims in terms of some notion of action. Zinchenko (1985) has argued that action – rather than the item nominated by Vygotsky, word meaning – is the appropriate unit of analysis in Vygotsky's theoretical framework. In particular, Zinchenko argues that "tool-mediated action" is a preferable analytic unit for Vygotsky in light of theoretical advances since the latter's time. Wertsch (1985, 1991) has similarly argued that "mediated action" is the appropriate unit of analysis for a Vygotskian-derived sociocultural approach. Both Zinchenko's and Wertsch's lines of reasoning draw on accounts of action developed after Vygotsky's death in 1934, but they are also based on the recognition that Vygotsky's formulation is quite compatible with taking action as a basic unit of analysis.

As already noted, there are several accounts of action on which one can draw to formulate a Vygotskian sociocultural approach. The one most often used to date is from the writings of Leont'ev (1981). The notion of action formulated by Leont'ev qualifies as a form of what Habermas (1984) terms "teleological action." This is a form of action that "may be evaluated on the criterion of truth . . . and on the criterion of effectiveness" (Bronckart, p. 78, this volume):

> Since Aristotle the concept of *teleological action* has been at the center of the philosophical theory of action. The actor attains an end or brings about the occurrence of a desired state by choosing means that have promise of being successful in the given situation and applying them in a suitable manner. The central concept is that of a *decision* among alternative courses of action, with a view to the realization of an end, guided by maxims, and based on an interpretation of the situation. (Habermas, 1984, p. 85)

As Wertsch (1991) has noted, this notion of action is in some respects compatible with Vygotsky's theoretical framework, given its concern with planning and executing problem-solving efforts. However, as the ideas of other figures such as Bakhtin and Habermas have entered the

discussion of how to formulate sociocultural research, the notion of teleological action becomes less tenable as a unit (at least as the *only* unit) of analysis. To be sure, the focus is still on action, as opposed to behavior or "events" (Bronckart, Chapter 3, this volume) or any other analytic unit that does not take issues such as meaning, interpretation, and "self-interpretation" (Taylor, 1985) into account. However, the formulation that would be compatible with the various forms of action explored in the sociocultural analyses of this volume needs to be quite broad, more along the lines of Burke's (1966) formulation of "symbolic action." While Burke is seldom mentioned in this volume, his ideas can nonetheless provide a useful framework for understanding how various claims about action and mediation are related, and for this reason we shall turn to him at several points in what follows.

In his account of symbolic action, Burke begins with the distinction between "action" and "sheer motion." For him, " 'action' is a term for the kind of behavior possible to a typically symbol-using animal (such as man) in contrast with the extrasymbolic or nonsymbolic operations of nature" (Gusfield, 1989, p. 53). Hence, action is in all cases symbolic action for Burke:

> There can be no action without motion – that is, even the "symbolic action" of pure thought requires corresponding motions of the brain. . . . There can be motion without action. (For instance, the motions of the tides, of sunlight, or growth and decay.) . . . Action is not reducible to terms of motion. For instance, the "essence" or "meaning" of a sentence is not reducible to its sheer physical existence as sounds in the air or marks on the page, although material motions of some sort are necessary for the production, transmission, and reception of a sentence. (Gusfield, 1989, pp. 53–54)

The differences between Burke's notion of action and the teleological account found in Leont'ev or Vygotsky become more evident as one looks further into Burke's (1969) "dramatistic" analysis. As Gusfield (1989) notes, "The concept of 'drama' implies action rather than motion" and "action is dramatic because it includes conflict, purpose, reflection, and choice" (p. 10). Burke (1969) outlined his notion of dramatic action in terms of his "dramatistic pentad":

> Dramatism centers on observations of this sort: for there to be an *act*, there must be an *agent*. Similarly, there must be a *scene* in which the agent acts. To act in a scene, the agent must employ some means, or *agency*. And it can be called an act in the full sense of the term only if it involves a *purpose* (that is, if a support happens to give way and one falls, such motion on the agent's part is not an act, but an accident). These