CHAPTER THREE

Thought, Word, and Deed: Toward a Transactional Typology of Action

War nicht das Auge sonnchaft Die Sonne Konnt es nie erblicken.
("If the eye were not sunlike, it could never see the sun.")
—Goethe, as quoted by Konrad Lorenz (1977)

The purpose of this chapter is to systematically explicate what we mean by transaction and how it assumes the primacy of nonverbal motor action. Textualists and others notwithstanding, language is developed out of, and remains in tension with, our sensorimotor, manipulative actions on the world. Drawing from Mead’s four-staged theory of the act, the “moment” of manipulation means acting on the world in such a way that desired changes are created; for example, the manipulation of a piece of flint to make a stone tool. As will become clear in other chapters, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) complement and further specify this practical rooting of language in nonverbal behavior, using current developments from neuroscience. This allows us to bring language and even our theory of concepts back down to the realities of our earthly existence where, as we contend, a refined but quite recognizable sense of objectivity is most relevant.

By ending the chapter with a typology of action ranging from the most unconstrained, purely symbolic covert activities to those overt activities most constrained by the dictates of obdurate realities, we offer
a way to transcend dualistic problems. The typology of action offered herein allows for a more balanced analysis of knowing and the known, organism and environment, and the subjective/objective relationship. This transactional option for treating hither-to-fore conceived "opposites" as mutually sustaining sides to identical coins is not a fall into Hegelian mysticism. We shall see that transactions and purely symbolic interactions are not the synonyms that some of us take them to be (Dewey and Bentley 1949, 121–24). Some symbolic interactions are transactional and some are not, with important consequences.

One of our goals, especially in part II of this volume, is to indicate how the transactional framework helps to resolve difficult problems arising from several branches of critically oriented social theory—in particular, the Frankfurt School theorists and Jürgen Habermas—as well as various forms of "postmodern" social theory. All of these traditions struggle with the dualisms of the rationalist paradigm, but none provide completely satisfactory answers to the dilemmas that rationalism has bequeathed. The transactional perspective embraces many of the criticisms of rationalism offered by these "emancipatory" approaches, but avoids the troubling implications of their proposed solutions to rationalist dilemmas.

In sum, this chapter builds up to a typology of action that allows one to distinguish between mere words and actual deeds in a way that is nonetheless consistent with the assertions above that words are actions. We would only add that words are actions of a type among other types. As the early critical sociologists realized, praxis is an important concept for referencing the world of deed and the reality-testing that symbolically guided deed makes possible. As mentioned above, current professional rhetoric that discourages consideration ofobjectivity, truth, and reality has also meant that the concept of praxis has fallen into relative disuse in the last 20 years.

The Concept of "Transaction"

Transaction was originally coined by Dewey and discussed at length by Dewey and Bentley in Knowing and the Known (1949). It is a broad epistemological approach to nature in general, and is one of three models of action and causation. The three models are self-action, interaction, and transaction. In the history of science, the models represent a type of evolution in sophistication.
Thought, Word, and Deed

**Self-Action**

Dewey and Bentley describe this model as a prescientific and archaic view that regards things as possessing powers of their own. As Bronowski (1958) puts it: “The medieval mind did not ask why the ripe apple fell to the ground, it was in its nature to do so.” This may strike us as an obvious tautology, but it fits a theistic age wherein different facets of nature were created in complete self-sufficiency with their own God-given natures. What did not act through its own power in ways fixed into it was looked upon as being defective. Rather than an object’s behavior being dependent on, and qualified by, other elements, it acted as their Creator wound it up to behave. This view is a major obstacle to understanding the social nature of mind, self, and an intentional notion of emotion and rational choice. (See Emirbayer [1997, 283–85] for more examples.) In the felicitous words of Dewey and Bentley (1949, 131), when the animistic self-actional treatments were knocked out of physics, “all the spooks, fairies, essences, and entities that once inhabited portions of matter now took flight to new homes, mostly in or at the human body, and particularly the human brain.” Within a Cartesian-like atomism, the mind is often presented as the “old self-acting ‘soul’ with its immortality stripped off, grown desiccated and crotchety.” When mind is seen as directing a specific behavior, one must assume a model of causation that substitutes a name for an explanation in the tautological model of the Middle Ages (see Dewey and Bentley 1949, 131–32). Positing a resident “psyche” or mind within the organism that initiates and thus explains behavior is now seen as ancient custom in the history of social psychology, but its converse is still popular, which is: “according to which the organism is wholly passive, and is generally molded into shape . . . by independent environmental conditions” (Dewey and Bentley 1949). Both views are equally nonproductive. Certainly, leading writers in neuroscience agree that the object seen is as much the result of what our brains do, as it is the result of what objects do.

Neither should we be deluded that the self-actional imagery has been dismissed from contemporary theorizing, as implied above. Elias (1978) and more recently Sampson (1981), Baumeister (1986), Sarbin (in Harré 1986), Scheff (1990), and Geertz (1979) have mounted rear-guard attacks on our ideologically tinged concept of the self-contained, autonomous person.1 Though they all have been influential, it can hardly be said that they have won the day. Elias has suggested that our notion of the autonomous individual with independently formed will, motivations, and interests is intuitively recognized as valid only because of the alien-
ated, anomic conditions of present Western society. The concept resonates with our emotional state and feeling of isolation, where so many insist that freedom means an across-the-board right to do as they please.

**Interaction**

Interactional views of nature won attention through Newton, who allegedly saw the descent of the ripened apple as a phenomenon that acted relative to effects of other particles outside of it and in turn affected them. Not only does the moon pull the earth’s waters into tides, but also the gravitational pull of the earth keeps the moon in orbit. Whereas the image of mutual effects upon discretely existing elements marks an advance in scientific models, units are still unequivocally independent in terms of origin and existence. In the final analysis, interaction as a model of nature still views the world as being comprised of individual things balanced against other independent things in causal interconnection. According to Emirbayer (1997, 285–86), “Entities remain fixed and unchanging throughout such interaction, each independent of the existence of others, much like billiard balls. . . .” The interpenetration of elements is limited to mutual causal influence. Variable analysis assumes an interactional position (Emirbayer 1997, 286). The variables or elements are not viewed as inherently implicated in the existence of the other. Here, accurate correlations depend on independence.

**Transaction**

It is important to understand the atomism that is implied in Dewey and Bentley’s critique, because this deficiency poses the problem that made a fully transactional view necessary and provided its raison d’être. The inadequacy of the concept interaction led Stone and Farberman (1970, 149) to prefer the term “social behaviorism” over “symbolic interaction” as stated above. Considering the wide currency of the latter, however, they settled for using it with explicit recognition of its inadequacies. The transactional viewpoint marks the level of sophistication represented by the transactional relativity of Einstein, Eddington, and Heisenberg in physics as well as Wittgenstein in social science. This level of inquiry avoids attributing action to independent self-actors or even to independently interacting elements.

RELATIONALISM IN TRANSACTION. The transactional viewpoint rests on the assumption of an interlocking fusion of organism and environment whereby one side of this coin is given its very character by the other side (Mead 1922, 157). This can be referred to as the relational aspect of
transaction that forms its core. Mead gives the example of an antelope bounding through the Savanna. It becomes that part of the environment known as food only in relationship to some other animal that has the capacity to eat it. Tree bark is not food for us. But it becomes food for a deer that brings to its experience a different set of taste buds, teeth, and digestive tract. Environmentally supplied food, then, is inseparably determined by organismic “sensitivities.” In Mead’s terms (1922, 159), “food exists as an immediate experience (only) in relation to the individuals that eat it.” There is no such thing as food apart from such individuals. In this manner, the dualistic hiatus between organism and environment is overcome.

Relational here is to be distinguished from a relativity suggesting that “anything goes.” Mead insists on a notion of constraint and objectivity within the relational world carved out for our experience by our own senses, organs, and impulses:

The causal effect of living organisms on their environment in creating objects is as genuine as the effect of environment upon the living organism. A digestive tract creates food as truly as the advance of a glacial cap wipes out some animals or selects others that can grow warm coats of hair. (Mead 1922, 160)

The relational aspect of transaction reminds us that any talk about environments as separate from the actions and capacities of the organisms that act on them is a dangerous abstraction. The way this fusion is achieved is by viewing environmental objects as those features that answer to, or sustain, the particular capacities of the organism to act toward them. Thus, organism and environment, nature and nurture are inseparably joined with each other. Morris, in his introduction to Mead’s work (1967, xxi), offers this transactional statement on value: “Value is the character of an object in its capacity to satisfy an interest . . . it resides neither in the object alone or in the . . . state of the subject” (emphasis added). In formulating transactional statements of the organism/environment relation, the organism’s interest is an outcome of its physiological sensitivities and capacities. The three words, interest, sensitivity, and impulse (capacity), are almost synonymous in this context. Furthermore, they are viewed as a product of the evolutionary transactional process to begin with. Even their source is inseparable from the environmental characteristics that originally shaped them. In the human organism, the distinctive capacity for symbolic reactivity is overlaid on our physical sensitivities. But transactionally, this broadening of sensi-
tivity on the part of the organism must also be recognized as a broadening of its environment. Mead addresses this point in a classic transactional passage:

The individual organism determines in some sense its own environment by its sensitivity. The only environment to which the organism can react is one that its sensitivity reveals. If . . . there is an increase in the diversity of sensitivity there will be an increase in the responses of the organism to its environment that is; the organism will have a larger environment. (Mead 1934, 245)

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ACTION IN THE TRANSACTIONAL FRAMEWORK. In the quotation above, Mead implies a point that is critical to his larger argument. Responses are seen as “intervening variables” through which the increase in sensitivity in the above quotation is translated into a larger perceptual environment. That is, sensitivities (interests and capacities) affect the organism’s environment only insofar as they “move beyond themselves” in manipulative action to shape adaptive behavior.

Sensitivities that are not objectively enacted remain self-contained. To treat the organism’s sensitivities as independent of reality-testing action fosters the very subject–object split that Mead and his colleagues were attempting to avoid. Again, to quote Dewey and Bentley (1949, 69) on transaction: “The interpenetration of the old dualism is revealed by avoiding the tendency to name characteristics of organisms alone, or environments alone, in every case they name the activity that occurs of both together” (emphasis added). Such is hardly the language of textualism and its variants.

We make a grave mistake if we overlook the significance of action at just this point. If we focus on the sensitivity (i.e., a digestive tract) as a self-contained entity without attention to its affect on the organism’s behavior on the world, we will be drawn into the very subjectivism that Mead labored so hard to avoid. A major problem with this subjectivism and the self-actional perspective it embraces is that it places mind and body in contradictory, diametrically opposed realms that force a choice between one or the other. Again, must we really choose between the reality and significance of continuity or change, abstract thought or sensation, universal or particular? Experience is of both, and the task of inquiry is to illuminate both.

While some thinkers through intellectual history started, as did Descartes, with the subjective knower and tried to proceed from there to understand the “objective” world, others like Wundt started with the objective world in order to discover the nature of inner consciousness.
The problem with these approaches has been that they become "stuck inside of themselves," as it were. It becomes difficult to formulate satisfactory accounts of the other dimension. The subjectivists have difficulty getting over to the objective side of the coin, and the objectivists have difficulty getting over to the subjective side. As a result, they both become one-sided accounts of existence.

Such is the weakness of the self-actional perspective that Mead and his colleagues avoided by their transactional approach. Its relevancy for critiquing much of the "linguistic turn" should be clear. Manis and Meltzer (1978, 12) are alluding to the inadequacies of self-actional models when they describe Mead’s quarrel with the tendency shared by rationalists and empiricists to see mind as a fixed substantial entity existing as a box-like container full of images, which mirror an external reality.

Mead’s way out of this intellectual morass was to start with action as behavior toward something, much as the European thinkers had transcended Descartes's subjectivism by insisting that consciousness is always conscious of something. The "intentional" quality of action points to experiences beyond itself (Lewis 1979, 142; Franks and Seeberger 1980). In positing a transactional relationship from the very beginning, the loggerhead created by having to work one’s way out of a subjective or objective self-container was eliminated. According to Tibbetts (1974, 116), in order to escape this "bridging problem," the pragmatists rejected the view that the subject-object relation was primarily a cognitive relation. Tibbetts illustrates this by reference to Dewey and Bentley’s (1949) plea to discard the term “knower” in favor of “knowings.” These processes were then defined in terms of phases of transactionally observed behaviors rather than by reference to cognitive states or other less intensely behavioral events. By taking the act as primary, Mead could define subject and object, perceiving and perceived in terms of phases or dimensions of the act (Tibbetts 1974, 116). By addressing subject and object as phases of action, what were once seen as dichotomies precluding and undermining each other’s realities were avoided. By beginning with action as a “neutral datum” that was neither mental nor physical, thought nor thing, the idealism–realism controversy was rendered irrelevant (Tibbetts 1974, 117).

For example, a leading pragmatist, Charles Morris, illustrates how Mead avoids the old hiatus between the intangible universal and the tangible particular. Both are seen as simply different phases of the same act rather than one coming from a preexisting mental realm and another from a separate physical realm:
Objects have universality in relation to an act capable of being furthered by various objects or aspects of objects. The objects have universality in relation to the act which they indifferently support; the act has universality as the character of being supported indifferently by a range of objects. (Morris in Mead 1967, xxvii)

Mead took universality down from its Platonic source in a mysterious realm of eternal forms and conceived of it as a derivative of the observable world of everyday action. By so doing he sought to avoid the antithesis of mind and body, being and becoming that has proved fatal to theorists from Plato to Whitehead (see also Morris in Mead 1967, xxviii).

*The Constraining Consequences of Action as the Neutral Datum.* Many symbolic interactionists notwithstanding, and with appreciation for the place of creative interpretation and profound relativity in social behaviorism, Meadian thought should not blind us to his insistence on equal attention to the more objective side of the transactional coin. Mead’s interest in avoiding self-actional subjectivism carries with it *ipso facto* the necessity of avoiding extreme relativism. Mead used the phrase “acts indifferently” or “impartially supported by a world that is there” on too many occasions for them to be an insignificant choice of words (see the quotation above). Packed into his repeated reliance on these two qualifiers is the recognition that the physical world imposes its own terms on us. These terms stand aloof and over against us. But this very indifference also produces the recurrence that makes possible human prediction. As stated before, fully felt meaning is not built up through words alone but by our own nonverbal actions. By symbolically noting which of our goal-directed actions are reliably “furthered” by the dependable responses they trigger in this world, generalized knowledge is created. We do not create or symbolically construct the indifferent answering of the world to the actions we bring forth to it. We symbolically interpret them and we perceive them selectively, but we do not initiate them. If we are to survive a 200-foot drop into the ocean, we must enter that ocean in one of the very few ways that its terms allow. However, from ten feet, it will answer back benignly to any number of entries from belly flops to cannonballs. Unlike sociologists with no comparable avenue for testing their “verbal approaches,” divers from high cliffs deal constantly with a world not of their making.

Regardless of Goffman’s (1959) legitimate emphasis on the interpersonal management of symbolic interpretations, inanimate nature is surely dumb and powerful: words do not cajole or deter her; the avalanche rumbles despite our most fervent prayers. Here we live in a world
of real success and real losses—we make mistakes and pay the consequences. We act in accordance with what supports our intents and judge these actions as efficacious by criteria stemming from processes we do not make. Divers and skiers relate to environments that are aptly and unproblematically described as objective and real. In such a world, even truths can and must be recognized. In a world of words where meanings are simply consensual, these words are not as relevant. "Objectivity" means only shared abstraction. The criteria to decide what is "real" or "true" are lost.

When Mead brought the universal down from the "heavenly spheres" and placed it in the nonmystical, evolutionary process of manipulation and cooperation, he had to forsake both the subjectivism and unfettered relativism of many current symbolic interactionists and extreme social constructionists. In order to fully understand the objective aspect of Mead's thought, we must see how behavior is constrained by at least three interlocking conditions. They are: 1) prerequisites for survival in the evolutionary process, 2) the limited number of effective means to any end in the world of action, and 3) the constraints imposed by significant symbols in the process of role-taking with objects in the social or physical environment.

Since there is general recognition of Mead's commitment to a Darwinian framework, there is no need to document this here. The constraint this system places on action and the symbols that subserve it has been generally ignored. Even though we no longer live in a social Darwinian environment, as long as we interact with the world, not just "anything goes." Without the criteria of physical and emotional constraint, we can think and imagine anything we want—the symbolic possibilities are limitless. But as soon as we become oriented to instrumental action and/or the manipulative stage of the act, the possibilities become limited. Once we leave the subjective world of inner imagination and commit to intentional actions in a world that responds to us indifferently, we realize that only those actions are valuable that are supported and furthered by forces we do not make. Certainly Mount Everest imposes limitations on actions directed to reaching its peak even with the aid of helicopters, and hunting large animals in the unprotected expanse of the tundra places certain limits as well as demands on the hunter.

Involvement in the manipulative stage of the act, social or physical, most often means we must get out of our skins, out of our own fantasy where our own symbolic possibilities are endless, and into a world that imposes terms on us. If we are to make manifest our symbolic inten-
tions, we cannot just think and do anything. We are limited to that range of actions supported and furthered by the way the social and material world answers back to our actions in it.

Note in the following quote how Mead’s rejection of the self-actional model of the disembodied linguist also embroils him in a clear rejection of rampant relativism (Mead 1934, 74):

> If you conceive of mind as just ... a conscious substance in which there are certain impressions and states ... then a word becomes purely arbitrary—it is just a symbol. ... You can pronounce [it] backwards, as children do; there seems absolute freedom of arrangement. ... If you recognize that language is ... a part of a co-operative process, that part which leads to an adjustment to the response of the other so that the activity can go on, then language has only a limited range of arbitrariness. (emphasis added)

Here we see how Mead realizes the constraints imposed by the indifferent—that is, impersonal—dictates of social cooperation and effective action. It should seem obvious at this point that action here has an intentional quality to it that is directed outward beyond one’s own self-reflection and inner fantasy.

But to see meaning and definitions of situations as constituted solely through symbols divorced from their function of guiding efficacious action is to reduce symbolic interaction to the very subjectivist nominalism and radical relativism that a transactional framework was designed to avoid. At a later point we will discuss the critical place of resistance in a behaviorist theory of perception. Leslie White’s (1949, 22) phrase “in the word was the beginning” to the contrary, in the beginning is the act. Originally, this act formed a purely motor process out of which words were later derived (see also Perinbanayagam 1985). The relationship between actor and the inanimate-object world discussed here as motor activity may seem too narrow in scope for describing the symbolic animal. Further chapters describe current knowledge about how higher levels of cognition derive from sensorimotor activity. It is basic to transaction that the emergence of the significant symbol presupposes an animal already linked together with its kind in socially organized behaviors—that language and thought are made possible only in the prior context of cooperative instrumental activity. The necessity of asserting such priority to avoid a subjectivist position will be clarified below.

In sum, Mead’s position implies an important level of action or interaction that is concretely separable from purely verbal activity when he deals with the developmental context of human thought. Insofar as a
large proportion of our actions must have an "intentional" quality to them, directed to a "world out there" that answers only to those human actions geared to the indifferent terms that we do not dictate—insofar as this is true, social behaviorism recognizes a fundamental difference between actions geared to instrumental activity and mere thinking. This is imperative for a transactional framework that avoids an exclusive emphasis on subjectivism and nominalism.

Transaction and the Objective Reality of Perspectives

Mead (1959, 161) combines his relationalism and his stress on the objective constraints placed on instrumental action in the notion of the "objective reality of perspectives." In order to clarify the place of this concept within a transactional framework, we will again return to Dewey and Bentley:

If interaction assumes the organism and its environmental objects to be present as substantially separate forms of existence prior to their entry into joint investigation, then transaction assumes no pre-knowledge of either organism or environment alone . . . but requires their acceptance in a common system. (1949, 123)

The "objective reality of perspectives" specifies the nature of this common system. On the one hand, the system is the character of the environment that enables it to receive and support—to answer to and consummate—the intentional actions that the organism brings forward. On the other hand, the common system is also the capacity of the organism to call out such a response to its intentions. Every organism is biologically equipped to pay predominant attention to certain stimuli to the exclusion of others. We have seen that every organism has its characteristic capacity to react to environmental distinctions that the other cannot. The capacity of these stimuli to answer to the sensitivities and actions of the organism is referred to as the patience of nature. The principles allowing for this mutuality or patience constitute a perspective: Dewey and Bentley's common system. It is this patience in nature that Lorenz's quote so aptly captures: "If the eye were not sunlike, it could never see the sun." The character of the sun that produces light waves and the character of the eye in receiving these waves form an objective slab that is "there in nature"—what Whitehead and Mead refer to as a consentient set. This set, slab, or common system would presumably arise within the evolution of the organism transacting with a sun-filled world. The streamlined form of the shark reflects the flow of water from which it evolved and the chiseled teeth of the beaver reflect the mal-
leability of the wood into which these teeth cut. Such a perspective is not a mere distortion or “selective bias” that carves out for our attention only one slice of the totality of a preexisting nature. Perspectives are, of course, relational, but these relations have been formed in nature and whether we are conscious of them or not, they are “objectively there.” Objective perspectives are “transactional slabs” enduring in nature itself, but always relative to the action-capacities of the organisms enabled by the aspects of the environment that “further” them. Thus, the perspective carried out by the sensitivities and behavioral capacities of a fly with its microscopic eyes differs from that of a dog whose long nose obscures the view already blurred by eyes that poorly discriminate colors and whose four legs keep it firmly rooted anyway toward ground smells. (See Dennett [1996] for a neuroscience point of view here.) These two perspectives of the fly and the dog differ greatly from that of homo sapiens. The latter’s upright posture, converging eyes on a flat face, and relatively underdeveloped ear and nose fix them in a world of splendid variations in color, while impoverishing their organic capacities to discriminate noises and smells.

Thus, the outside ranges of the worlds made available by these perspectives are objectively limited by nature. Every animal lives in its distinct world that, while relative to its capacities, is objectively “there in nature.” The objective reality of perspectives is then inseparable from a transactional framework. We can see this clearly in Mead’s statement:

The process by which the organism has arisen is . . . one in which the organism has determined its field by its dependence between the two. This is expressed in the term “perspective.” . . . The conception of a world . . . independent of any organism is one without perspectives . . . . There would be no objects except physical particles, for every other object involves abstractions from relations that are as real as those in the object and in the environment, and the only ground for such abstraction can be found in the attitude of some . . . structure which maintains itself through a patience of the world to that structure. (1959, 163–65)

In the human case, the common system or perspective that made it possible for members of a society to share worlds did not originate full-blown from a linguistic capacity that was born of itself. Mead (1959, 167) clearly roots it in activity independent of, and prior to the emergence of, symbolic processes. Communication is a social process whose natural history shows that it arises out of cooperative activities such as those involved in sex, parenthood, fighting, herding, and the like. Currently,
many argue that language arises out of emotional communications (J. H. Turner 2000).

In this manner, according to Goff (1980), the temporal priority of action as distinct from symbolic thought is established. The importance of the theoretical priority of action in its broadest sense will emerge below.

Toward a Typology of Action
from Thought to Deed

As in all analytical pursuits, monolithic definitions must give way to specification. Austin (1975) and, more currently, Butler (1997) distinguish types of verbal actions as *performative, illocutionary*, and *perlocutionary* (see the above discussion of Burke’s interest in the nonverbal). The specification that is reflected in the following typology derives from our discussion of transaction and Peirce’s quote mentioned earlier that the world is learned in two phrases: mastery and limitation, capacity and resistance. The pairs here are obviously implicated in each other. Thus the most important end points on the continuum from the first through the fifth levels of action are arranged according to the amount of resistance to be overcome and concomitantly the amount of competency demanded by way of the situations. Other dimensions include the amount of effort and focalized attention demanded, as well as the situation’s potential for surprise and its significance for one’s identity. As with all continuum thinking, the boundaries marking the five levels must be somewhat arbitrary and the levels must be seen as “family resemblances” rather than being categorical, with no overlap. These categories are not meant to be reified. Below, it is assumed that human acts are social though our discussion focuses on additional attributes of constraints.

We take our lead here from Dewey’s ([1925] 1958) analysis of the fully meaningful experience that he sees as a balance between “doing” and “undergoing.” (By the latter, he means “reflection.”) In the doing phase of experience the emphasis is on the actor’s experience as a locus of cause—of manipulation, of bringing things about, of making things happen. The undergoing phase refers to a self-reflective registering of experience wherein action is delayed as one mentally absorbs the consequences of his enacted impulses and its significance for the self-system: “Unbalance on either side blurs the perception of relations and leaves the experience partial and distorted” (Dewey [1925] 1958, 44). A preemptive lust for action leaves persons with experiences of superficial paucity characteristic of the “sociopath” (Becker 1964). A preemptive focus on reflective
undergoing may produce rich fancies and impressions, but this experience is devoid of sagacious judgment or appreciation for practical realities and the intangible sensitivities of people who have actually "been there"—who have, in Dewey's terms, "suffered" the real experience.\textsuperscript{5}

With important exceptions like panic and prognostication, it is often easier to imagine than to do. In the world of doing, let us say writing, unexpected irrelevancies arise that are tempting distractions; digressions suggest themselves in terms of enrichments. These were not present in the image prior to doing. It is devoid of embodied exhaustion, boredom, finger-cramping, and a stiff back. Actual dealing with these unforeseen resistances requires greater "perceptibility" than mere thought. Without actual embodiment, "an experience" in Dewey's sense remains incomplete.

In the previous chapter we stressed the amount of unpredictability of immediate contact with the lived experience, or actuality. Thoughts also surprise us, but with important exceptions we can dismiss or change them. Deeds, as distinct from thoughts, have to cope with this. Actual events are usually better or worse than we imagine. As a matter of fact, they are often better and worse at the same time. Sexual experiences can be a case in point. As our thoughts are committed to writing, problems of qualification and expression come to mind that were not confronted when pencil and paper were taken in hand to write. For example, in the immediacy of writing this text, we have to decide whether it is necessary to include a sentence granting that life has to have enough predictability to make effective responses possible. And then we need to decide whether to be more specific about the kind of "subtle" unpredictability we are discussing. The writer stops to ponder the choice of a word. He is surprised at the need to control his urge to spend pages on this little exercise. He had none of this "in mind" when he started; yet it describes precisely the distinction between thinking about writing and the more intense writing as deed. Now that this much has been submitted to paper, the need to make a further distinction becomes evident that was not evident before. Writing may be an overt action and share therefore the quality of deed, but it certainly needs to be placed somewhere below the mid-point on a continuum between inner thought and dealing with what we call social and/or physical reality. There is surely a difference between manipulating words on paper and dealing effectively with concrete people. An important difference is that when dealing only with words, one only has to be "careful" to handle one's own idiosyncrasies and speak to the impersonal "generalized other" of some reference group. With concrete others, at least two sources of immediate idiosyn-
crasies must be considered: one's own as well as the other's. It is also of significance that the writer can erase his or her words, but to erase a social blunder is ultimately the prerogative of others.

At least with people, we can negotiate another chance. This is more than we can do with a mountain avalanche, a riptide, or the awful finality of the bullet shot in an instant of rage. It is at this point that we have come again to the importance of resistance—more specifically, different degrees of recalcitrance.

*The First Level of Action*

On the lowest level of action, we are thinking about something and are often using our active powers to assess alternatives. We either automatically or with awareness force ourselves minimally to be constrained by impersonal rules or logic (e.g., the norm of rational efficiency or those of "due process"). To the extent that we are manipulating these rules consciously, guiding our thought by the terms they impose and using our self-powers, we are engaged in a some "low-level" doing, even if our behavior is internal and not yet made manifest or objectified. Thinking requires effort and can result in physical tiredness. As de Sousa (1987) reminds us, we drink coffee for the physiological value of caffeine in order to stay alert. Even here, thought is embodied to some extent. On this lowest level, the constraints are up to us to ignore or not. We operate more within our own terms.

*The Second Level of Action*

In placing thought on paper, we usually enter into another level. For most persons, it is harder to write than to simply think, though at times writing can be used to help thought. This observation has been detailed above. While we can be surprised at the point where our logic leads us, writing for audiences other than ourselves increases the motive for role-taking and thus choosing words with more care. It frequently necessitates dealing with the constraints of grammar and vocabulary. It adds a new level of surprise, as viewing our words forces new thoughts to emerge and new decisions to be made. By making the idea permanent, more reflection is possible and more complexities must be handled. In short, more potential resistance must be overcome than with private thought. Writing letters and memos and the like still lacks the quality of concrete face-to-face interaction with another person. Writing to workers that they are being terminated when their offices are nearby can be seen as a "cop-out." One does not have to deal with the feelings of the other person—at least not in that moment. In face-to-face situations we
deal with real persons who often place immediate, embodied terms on us and are capable of genuine surprise. This is why television characters cannot be “friends” to the audience, some writers to the contrary. Granted, they can surprise us, but without instrumental consequence. Diaries, of course, should be placed as a subcategory of inner dialogue. After all, no one has to see it—and thus we do not have to deal as much with the “resistance” of others’ actual responses.

The Third Level of Action

Talking to others is the public announcement of self. It is the everyday manifestation of who we are. As we have seen, there is a lot at stake. In this sense it is “doing” on the verbal level. Butler (1997) discusses how we injure persons with talk. At this level, we open-up ourselves more to contingencies inherent in the interactive process. Here, unless we are all-powerful, we must control our own idiosyncrasies as well as considering those of others. In relatively egalitarian situations, our effectiveness in announcing our identities is dependent on our social skills and manipulative powers. However, the outcome, insofar as we stake ourselves on others’ responses, is once again ultimately in their control. We are always potentially vulnerable to human capriciousness. This can also be true for previous levels, but it prevails more consistently at the level of talk. Surprise is common and puts a premium on our ability to deal with it immediately. The confrontation with the immediate realities of other persons has a unique potential for calling forth change and development in the individual.

The Fourth Level of Action

The fourth level of action can only partially be captured by the word “deeds.” It has to do with putting our thought and/or words to work and making them actually happen. Ideally, there is a tendency for task-oriented interactions to challenge the predominance of identity-oriented interactions (Turner 1968). This level involves the practical world of objective application; it is impervious to favoritism; like the avalanche, it cannot be cajoled. With no dispensation to make amends, this world frequently gives us but one chance. Above all, it is the final activity whereby our ideational intentions to provoke specific changes in a world standing indifferently against us are made into actuality. It is important to see that this activity is the final instrumental endpoint of adaptive consummations in Mead’s four-staged theory of the act. We will remember that these phases are impulses to action, perception, manipulation, and consumption. The scholar who writes about the world
must draw on a sizable amount of competencies and self-powers, but the kind of action referred to in the fourth level must transcend mere writing, which is something we have argued most sociologists fail to do. In this scheme, the phrase "statistical tests of group differences" hides the dearth of actual tests that can only be those of practical application—of using this knowledge to produce desired changes in an indifferent environment and refining our theory on this basis. The "real" test according to the theory of praxis is in the registering of the objective consequences of our actions. Indeed, on the individual level, consequences that are the result of focalized attention, intended effort, persistence, and our own self-powers are experienced differently than events that just passively happen to us (White 1965). An example of level four activity would be that involved with "edgework" (Lyng 1990b) wherein actors seek the most demanding and unforgiving activities in which to test their competencies, including the overcoming of fear.

The Fifth Level of Action

Finally, a fifth level of action can be identified, which brings us to the principal domain of sociological inquiry: the study of institutional patterns of society and culture. We must emphasize again that the distinctions contained within the typology are merely analytic and therefore not to be understood as "objectively" given. Thus, by adding a fifth level to the typology, we seek to distinguish various dimensions or facets of action referred to as "praxis"—understood as reflective action put to work for the satisfaction of human ends. The concept of praxis allows us to understand the concept of "reality" as a human product, but also as parts of the social and physical universe that answer indifferently to human action. Hence, the "objective world" is treated here as one side of a dialectical relationship established by an ongoing process, which is described by Marx (1964b, 157) as the "humanizing of nature and the naturalizing of man."

In conceiving of praxis as intentional action to bring about changes in the social world, we have seen that the ideational forms through which we perceive and know the world cannot be separated from interest-oriented action to achieve specific ends (Ollman 1971). An equally important "moment" of praxis is the social dimension of the act. Rather than separating the individual and society as do traditional sociological perspectives, a transactional conception makes no ontological distinction between these two levels. As human beings interact with nature to fulfill their needs, they engage in action that is naturally and necessarily social. This implies that "reality is not inextricably bound up with indi-
Individual activity, but that this activity must be comprehended in terms of its social character” (Goff 1980, 28). Thus the objects of action in our final level are social and cultural structures. While action at the collective or structural level can reveal the same transactional features that characterize action at less emergent levels, the institutional realm offers us much greater complexity than the domains heretofore considered. This complexity can be attributed in part to the fact that the institutional domain subsumes all of the other levels of action. When individuals engage in collective action to solve survival problems by participating in a division of labor and other institutional structures, they not only deal with the resistance of a world of material forces, but also the interactional world of individuals cooperating to achieve collective goals. Thus the individual’s experience in the institutional domain represents the most pronounced confrontation with an objective world of resistance to his or her actions. Indeed, the resistances of the institutional order can be properly conceptualized as the realm of “social constraints” existing in dialectical opposition to “spontaneous” human action, a dialectic emphasized by both Marx and Mead (Blake 1976; Lyng 1990a).

From a transactional perspective, a key problem in analyzing the institutional order is to understand how social and cultural forms either solve or fail to solve problems of human survival, and to identify the social processes that give rise to either of these outcomes. What drives the institutionalization process, in this view, are collectivities seeking to apply, elaborate, or modify the stock of existing cultural knowledge and socialized capacities to deal with unique problems arising in particular historical epochs.

As with problem solving at all levels, the historically specific reality to which these collective efforts are directed responds indifferently to the institutional action and the various knowledge systems that inform this action.

Conclusion

Much more can be said about the nature of the institutional patterns that constitute the fifth level of action in our typology, but the present discussion is sufficient to achieve the primary purpose of this chapter—to distinguish types of human action in terms of their transactional characteristics. If action proceeds and in a real sense affects perceptions, we must come to grips with the differences in resistances that types of action must overcome. This discussion represents only a start in that direction.
From a transactional perspective, it is understood that we perceive most clearly what we have the capacity to act toward. We selectively perceive that which answers to the “telos” of our actions or tendencies. Our active behavioral repertories greatly influence what is most salient in our awareness. This is another sense in which behavior is prior to perception. The reflective registering of consequences from the behavioral world of praxis feeds back to create change in self-knowledge. A typology of action allows us to analyze the various modes of experience and perception that result from a preponderance of personal (and social/cultural) choices in favor of one level of action over another (see chapters 5 and 8). For example, the “hyper-cognized” mentality of our age and its tyranny of abstraction may well be a case in point. Dewey’s assumption was that as we develop efficacious ways to act towards objects, the object world is reduced to clarity; perceptions are made more refined, more lucid, and richer in quality. If the “higher” levels of action call out our capacities in a different and perhaps more demanding way than other types of action, then we can hypothesize that perceptions will be made more sagacious thereby (see Becker 1964).

NOTES

1. The very opposite extreme occurs in poststructuralist theorizing that minimizes, and sometimes obliterates, the self. This is to us a form of textualism wherein “language speaks the person” and so on. There is, of course, truth in this observation. But to negate the person is a consequence of the “all within discourse” axiom. Transaction roots the self significantly in manipulative action (see also the neuroscientist Damasio [1999] and Lakoff and Johnson [1999]). Only bodies guided by selves act on the world outside of discourse.

2. This is precisely what textualism does: It focuses on language and even concepts as self-contained and irrelevant to the objective constraints found in the world of manipulative action. The viability of the term “objective” hardly has a place in this kind of untempered subjectivism.

3. Herein is a not-too-implicit criticism of the linguistic idealism that Rorty questioned in parts of the linguistic turn.

4. The process of role-taking, of course, has allowed us the distinctively human capacity to get outside of ourselves in order to mesh our own actions with terms imposed by both physical things and other people. Effective action requires that we implicitly respond to our own conduct prior to the response of the object to us. This is the general principle of a voluntaristic model of behavioral control: self-control means that we respond to our own actions in a very prescribed and objective way—namely, that way in which the external person or thing would respond. Only then can our self-responses be used to monitor and guide our own behavior in effective ways. In sum, both social custom and the
indifferent nature of the physical world impose limitations on efficacious actions demanded by a behavioristic scheme. Current theorizing has become more sensitive to the embodiment of social interaction and implies qualifications in specifying situations that foster such deliberate self-consciousness, as do some forms of role-taking. If the demands and speed of social interaction make “athletes” of us all, deliberation must be a “sometimes” affair. Role-taking is also often intuitive. Nonetheless, as reflective animals, we are indeed capable of deliberate role-taking with others as well as with physical objects. It is a process critical to our social character.

5. This qualitative difference between mentalities largely forged through “making things happen” in an impartial world of application and mentalities formed primarily by playing words on other words is emphasized by Dewey more than Mead. Though we allude to it in this chapter, various ways of conceptualizing this difference are elaborated on in chapter 5 and by using examples from neuroscience to emphasize its importance.