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# DETECTIVE STORIES AT DINNERTIME: PROBLEM-SOLVING THROUGH CO-NARRATION

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## *I. Introduction*

### *A. Goals*

For over a year, our research group[1] has been going into homes in the early evening for several hours, video- and audio- recording families eating dinner, relaxing, and putting children to bed. We are analyzing ways in which white, English-speaking American families varying in social class solve problems through talk. The present analysis is based on over a hundred hours of recorded interactions, approximately eight hours for each of 14 families (8 high SES and 6 low SES) from our initial corpus.

In this paper, our focus is on narrative as a problem-solving discourse activity. Our concern is the interface of cognitive and social activity, as outlined in Vygotskian theory (Vygotsky 1978, 1981, Wertsch 1985, Rogoff & Lave 1984). Our data indicate how problem-solving through story-telling is a socially-accomplished cognitive activity: family members articulate solutions to problems posed by narrated events and at times work together to articulate the narrative problem itself. Such joint cognizing can be seen as part of what families do — what makes a family an 'activity system' (Engeström, 1987, *to appear*). Thus, joint problem-solving through narrative gives structure to family roles, relationships, values, and world views.

### *B. The Activity of Dinner*

#### *1. Dinner as an Opportunity Space*

While narratives are told among family members in numerous settings, dinnertime is a preferred moment for this activity in many American families. Dinnertime is a time when adults and children often come together after being apart throughout the day, a somewhat unique time period for many families wherein there is some assurance of a relatively captive audience for sounding things out. Dinnertime is thus an *opportunity space* — a temporal, spatial, and



social moment which provides for the possibility of joint activity among family members. Families use this opportunity space in different ways: some families talk more than others; some talk only about eating; others use the moment to make plans or recount the day's events. Whatever direction the talk takes, dinnertime is a potential forum for generating both knowledge and social order/disorder through interaction with other family members. Dinnertime thus provides a crystallization of family processes, what activity theorists (Leontyev 1981, Wertsch 1985) might call a 'genetically primary example' of family life.

#### *2. Dinner Arrangements*

Physical arrangements for eating dinner vary across the households in our study and within households in the course of a single evening. As illustrated in Figure 1, dinner arrangements vary in terms of three dimensions: time, space, and activity focus. In terms of the *temporal* dimension, dinners may be staggered or synchronous. That is, family members may eat at different times or concurrently. In some families, children and adults eat when they are hungry and not necessarily at the same time. Families often do not eat at the same time every day of the week. Second, dinners may vary *spatially* in that family members may be dispersed or assembled while eating. Sometimes children eat in one room or one part of a room and one or more adults eat elsewhere. Third, dinners vary in terms of whether family members are overtly attending to different activities or share the same *activity focus*. For example, certain members may be watching television as they eat, while others are talking to one another. In other families, all members, at least on the surface, appear to be engaged in the same activity focus, either as ratified participants in the same conversation or as co-viewers of the same TV program.

| DIMENSIONS | ARRANGEMENT TYPES | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | DECENTRALIZED | \| | CENTRALIZED |
| TEMPORAL | STAGGERED | vs. | SYNCHRONOUS |
| SPATIAL | DISPERSED | vs. | ASSEMBLED |
| ACTIVITY FOCUS | DIVERSE | vs. | SHARED |

Figure 1: Dinner Arrangements

Dinners characterized by features along the right side of Figure 1 (*i.e.* family members eating at same time and place and sharing activity focus) are more centralized and tend to be more formal and last longer than dinners characterized by features on the left side of Figure 1 (*i.e.* family members eating at different times and places and engaging in different activities).

*3. Dinner and Talk*

These different dinner arrangements have implications for the amount and kind of talk that takes place at dinnertime (cf. Feiring and Lewis, 1987). The more centralized dinners promote more extensive problem-solving through talk. Family members who sit down together to eat appear to use a wider range of problem-solving genres — not only stories, but plans and arguments as well. With respect to stories, centralized dinners tend to promote longer stories, with more audience involvement in sorting out problems, solutions and stances. Stories in the decentralized dinners tend to fill one page or less of transcript and do not significantly involve other interlocutors in problem-solving. In contrast, stories in centralized dinners can fill several pages; in one example, a narrative threads through 46 pages of a 64-page dinner transcript as family members work through unresolved aspects of a narrative situation over a 40-minute period.

In this sense, families who eat together exploit the opportunity space differently from families who decentralize dinnertime. Centralized dinners appear to provide an enduring moment in which family members can help one another to sort out problematic events in their lives through co-narration. The resulting narratives, as we shall see, differ markedly from narratives in which a story line is presented in an orderly fashion, where settings are fixed at the outset of the telling and events are chronologically and causally ordered.

Centralized dinner arrangements tend to promote more than co-narrated stories; they also promote opportunities for adults to exert power over children. Relative to decentralized dinner arrangements, centralized dinners appear more ritualized, entailing conformity to numerous eating conventions. Many dinners involve opening and closing rituals, such as saying grace and asking permission to be excused. Further conventions include where to sit, how to sit, which utensils to use, how close the serving dish should be from the plate, how much food one should serve oneself, how to request food, how to respond to offers of food, when to speak vis-a-vis eating, the order of eating different foods, which foods must be eaten, quantity of food which must be eaten off plate and so on. Each of these conventions may become a locus for compliance-gaining negotiation between adults and children. In this sense, centralized dinners provide a greater opportunity space for the exertion of social control over children. In contrast, decentralized dinners empower children to organize their own dinner activities. Decentralization seems to allow children greater freedom while exposing them less to adult narrative styles and problem-solving approaches.

## *II. Narratives*

### *A. Approaches to Narrative*

Studies of narrative tend to be either cognitive or sociological. Cognitive studies focus on stories as problem-solving genres. While definitions of what constitutes a story differ, most studies emphasize that stories contain one central problematic event — sometimes called 'an initiating event' — which precipitates a series of actions and reactions. The presentation of the core narrative problem and its resolution or non-resolution entails several story components, including: setting, initiating event, internal response, attempt, consequence, and reactions (Stein 1979, Stein & Policastro 1984, Trabasso *et al.* 1984). In these studies, a major interest is the cause-effect relations among components and their mental representation by children and adults.

Sociological studies focus on social consequences or social production of a story. For example, Labov and others have demonstrated how narrators restructure their biographies through careful reframing of past events (Labov, 1984; Fisher, 1985a, 1985b; Schiffrin; 1987). Other studies have emphasized the role of the audience as co-author of the narrative (Duranti 1986, Goodwin 1986a, 1986b, Haviland 1986, Jefferson 1978, Lerner 1987, Mandelbaum 1987a, 1987b, Sacks 1964-72). These studies look at the co-construction of stories and consider the impact of audience's (story recipients') participation on the telling of stories. In this framework, recipients as well as tellers impact the life of a story in various ways: they may derail a story, encourage its continuation and elaboration, or change its direction.

Our approach is synthetic, recognizing the importance of both cognitive and sociological approaches to narrative and their implications for each other. In particular, cognitive approaches tend to focus on *individual* tellings and retellings of stories without attending to the fact that stories are often if not typically collaboratively produced, *i.e. co-narrated*, by those participating in the social interaction. On the other hand, sociological approaches emphasize co-narration but do not link co-narration to *co-cognition*, specifically to the joint working out of problems. Our study will demonstrate both that narrative components are constituted, ordered, and clarified through social collaboration and that problem-solving motivates co-narration. We believe, in other words, that the

activity of co-narration stimulates problem-solving, while the activity of problem-solving stimulates co-narration. To see how this mutual stimulation manifests itself, we turn to dinner narratives in American households.

### *B. Detective Stories*

#### *1. Introduction*

The stories in our corpus differ in the degree to which story problems are reformulated in the course of storytelling. Certain tellings involve extensive participation of other family members in a groping process to make sense out of the problem underlying the narrative's initiating event. We call such narratives 'detective stories' in the sense that there is missing information felt by some co-narrator(s) to be vital to understanding the problem that motivates actions and reactions of protagonists and others in the storytelling situation. Co-narrators return, sometimes again and again, like Lieutenant Columbo, to pieces of the narrative problem in an effort to find 'truth' through 'cross-examination' of the details, sometimes struggling for an illuminating shift in perspective.

The co-narrated detective stories in our corpus differ from stories in which a story problem is laid out by an authoritative teller whose perspective on the problem is relatively undisputed (cf Lerner 1987 and Mandelbaum 1987a and 1987b for extended discussion). In the latter cases, the perspective on a story problem, that is, the version of an initiating event presented by an authoritative teller, is more or less sustained throughout the telling. In detective stories, however, authority to define a narrative problem is not vested solely in a single knowing teller. A story problem is scrutinized in the course of the telling: other co-present participants, even those who do not have direct knowledge of the narrated events, probe for or contribute information relevant to clarifying a narrative problem. This new information may or may not lead to a reformulated perspective on a narrative problem. When family co-narrators do overtly adopt a novel perspective on a narrative problem, we see evidence of a paradigm shift. Such cognitive shifts are socially engendered and have social implications, reaffirming the family as a dynamic activity system capable of working through problems.

Besides subverting the notion of one authoritative teller, detective stories also impact the organization of story components. In detective stories, there are at least two versions of a narrative problem that emerge. A story with a setting, an initiating event and subsequent responses is presented and could be treated by those co-present as complete; however, the mark of the detective story is that somebody persists in examining the narrative problem beyond this point, eliciting or introducing relevant information not provided in the initial version of the story. Sometimes the 'missing' information is presented immediately following the first version of a story, *e.g.* example (1) below. In other cases, the 'missing' information surfaces much later and, as we shall see in example (2), may be extracted from other stories that involve relevant characters or events. Turning two or more seemingly inconsequential stories, or bits and pieces, into one detective story requires someone who makes a commitment — someone who persists, who makes connections, who draws inferences. The information which surfaces may lead to a reanalysis of the earlier story's central problem. Such information thus recontextualizes the earlier story as not *the* story but *a* story, *i.e.* only one version of the narrated events.



We believe that talk which recontextualizes earlier storytelling is storytelling as well. Our analysis of detective storytelling illustrates our more general view that storytelling in conversation is dynamic and open-ended. Stories often do not come in neat packages. Recent research suggests that story beginnings are socially negotiated (Lerner 1987; Mandelbaum 1987a, 1987b). In detective stories, we see that 'the end' is also socially negotiated.

Our working hypothesis is that detective stories are typical of everyday narration. They grow out of the process of grappling with life's incomplete understandings. Initial narrators often seek the kind of co-narration that both helps further their own comprehension of their stories and give meaning to their stories and their lives.

#### *2. The Role of Slow Disclosure*

The structure of detective stories in conversation parallels that of certain literary and cinematic tales. Such stories are particularly characterized by a strategy known as 'slow disclosure,' that is, the gradual emergence of relevant information or the "prolonged delay in giving away crucial facts in a story" (Sharff 1982: 119). For film directors and writers, slow disclosure is a conscious technique for drawing audiences into some unfolding problem; its strategic use creates rhetorical and powerful effects, such as heightened tension. In the narratives we are examining, slow disclosure does not appear to be a conscious technique but rather an outcome of problem-solving through co-narration. Critical elements of the narrated events are slowly disclosed through joint attention to particular parts of the narrative, especially through the probing contributions of intimates.

For example, the setting, which provides physical and psychological background to understanding the narrative problem, may be probed and subsequently elaborated or revised through further co-narration. Experiences and

events critical to assessing the psychological setting — beliefs, values and attitudes — may not even be treated by initial tellers as relevant or desirable to reveal at the outset of the narrative. While family members can assume some of this information because of familiarity with the narrator and the narrative circumstances, they also depend on the talk itself to index parts of the psychological setting. These may prove critical to their assessments and thus to the evolution of the narrative itself. New settings present opportunities for co-narrators to recontextualize the initiating event and the responses and reactions it incurs. Thus, co-constructed, unfolding settings orient and re-orient a story throughout its telling.

Slow disclosure of elements such as psychological setting may result in part from a preference of initial tellers to present narrated events in a way that portrays themselves in the most complimentary light. We refer to this preference as the 'looking good' constraint on storytelling.

Example (1) is a relatively simple illustration of slow disclosure and the 'looking good' constraint operating in a detective story, showing how settings unfold through co-narration:

*(1) Detention Narrative* — Family B Dinner #2, p 12-14

Mother, Father, and two children — Lucy, 9 years and Chuck, 6 years — are seated around dinner table; they have been discussing degrees of familiarity a person can have with colleagues at work or school and Chuck has offered, as an example, that he knows Mrs. Arnold, the school principal, very well and Mother has commented that she is a good person to know.

Lucy: I don't think Mrs. Arnold is being fair because um
Mother: Bill?
Father: ( ? )
Lucy: When we were back in school um — this girl — she pulled um Valerie's dress up to here ((gestures with hand across chest)) in front of the boys
Mother: mhm?
Lucy: She only — all she did was get a day in detention
Mother: mhm? — *You* think she should have gotten suspended?
(pause)
Lucy: at *least* — that's —
Mother: mhm?
Lucy: not allowed in *school*
(pause)
Father: ((clears throat)) hm — (fortunately capital)



punishment is still =
Chuck: Was it a girl Lucy who did it or a boy=
[
Father: =beyond the (pri-/reach of) elementary school principals
Chuck: =that did that
[
Mother: ( ? )
Chuck: hm?
Mother: (Lucy) was *really* embarrassed ((talking while eating)) (I mean you really) would have liked to kill the girl — huh? Cuz you were upset with her? But you were held back because you thought your school was goin to do it and the school didn't do it and you feel upset
(pause)
Chuck: I think she should be in there for a *whole* MONTH or so well maybe (pause) *each day* she have to go there — *each* day *each* day *each* day even if the —
[
Lucy: If you go to detention more than three times then you get suspended
Father: ((head leaning forward)) More than how many times?
Lucy: Three
Father: ((nods))
(pause)
Chuck: Lucy — you only went to it *once* — right?
Father: ((clears throat))
((Lucy arches her back, eyes open wide, looks at Chuck, shocked, starts shaking her head; father immediately looks up at her))
Father: You can tell us can't you?
[
Mother: I'm listening
Lucy: ((low to Chuck)) (thanks) — ((louder)) yeah — that was —

Mother: was in detention once? —
Lucy: once
Mother: in Mr. Dodge's year
Chuck: only once that's all
[
Mother: ( ? ) in the playground?
Father: hm
Chuck: Lucy if you get a second a third and a fourth that means you're out — *right?*
Mother: Well no honey not every year — (you're allowed) to start new every year
(pause)
Father: like the statute of limitations
(fairly long pause)
Mother: things run out after a while

In this narrative, the information that Lucy, the initial narrator, was once punished by Mrs. Arnold, the principal of her school, is a critical aspect of the setting, because it illuminates Lucy's psychological stance towards the same principal's punishment of another student's misdemeanor. Lucy at first does not present her own past misdemeanor as part of the setting but simply situates the initiating event in a physical setting ("When we were back in school..."). In line with the 'looking good' constraint, Lucy would probably never have disclosed this personally damaging critical background information.

Prior to this disclosure, family members had only Lucy's version of the narrated problem as data for interpreting her reactions. Presumably Lucy felt the way she did only because of the morally offensive nature of the misdemeanor. This is the interpretation her mother promotes, co-constructing the telling of her daughter's internal responses and emotional reactions. A joint sense of moral indignation stimulates increasingly drastic proposals for punishment — from "suspension" to "at least (suspension)" to "would have liked to kill the girl" — until Lucy's younger brother elicits the crucial background information by asking his sister, "Lucy, you only went to it [detention] once, right?" Lucy glares at her brother, mumbles to her parents and grudgingly admits to going to detention.

This new co-authored setting recontextualizes both the narrative problem and Lucy's reactions: Now the principal is not fair because the principal gave the same punishment — one day's detention — to both Lucy *and* the horrid girl who committed a far more serious transgression than Lucy presumably



had. Thus we see how co-participants in the telling of a story "assist" one another in bringing a narrative problem into focus. Such assistance, however, is not always welcome: it may subvert the initial narrator's attempt to look good. In this case, the narrative seems to have backfired on Lucy and left her damaged by the account, further indexed by her sudden inarticulateness after the revelation.

*3. Paradigm-Shifting Detective Stories*

In the case of the Detention narrative, there is no overt evidence that the family has in fact used the newly disclosed setting to reanalyze the problem embedded in the initiating event, *i.e.* they do not overtly use the knowledge of Lucy's own misdemeanor and one day's detention to reframe the morally untenable misdemeanor (the pulling up of the dress) in a new context: It is *more* serious than the wrongdoing committed by Lucy in the past. The family's doubletake does lead to a softening of response towards transgressors, now that Lucy is included in this category, but then the topic is abruptly dropped.

In other narratives, however, co-tellers display through talk their realization that there is a problem with earlier framings of the problem. Attending to the unfolding disclosures, co-narrators negotiate and in some cases adopt an entirely new perspective, or even a new paradigm, for considering a narrated problem. The adoption of a new paradigm is akin to scientific paradigm shifts of the sort noted by Kuhn (1962, 1977).

Paradigm-shifting through co-narration is illustrated in example (2), a very complex detective story extending over 40 minutes of dinnertime talk and still going on during clean-up. The initial narrator of this story is Marie, the mother in the family being recorded and director of a day care center in their home. Her story grows out of an incident which has just occurred prior to dinner in which Bev, the mother of one of the day-care children, presents Marie with $320. The evolving issue which drives the narrative concerns the meaning of this act — the definition of the narrative problem. Is it payment for one month's child care? Or is it a penalty fee for pulling the child out of the school without two weeks' notice? As Marie first reports the incident, only the first of these questions arises between Marie and Bev:

*(2-a) Bev Narrative* — 7:17 p.m., F Dinner #1, p 18-19

Mother (Marie), Father (Jon) and 3 children — Adam, 9, Julie, 5, and Eric, 3 — seated around dinner table; food has been distributed, Jon has said grace, and a family friend has just left.

Marie: Bev walked up and handed me three twenty
Jon: mhm
Marie: And I *thought* she only owed me eighty — and she said

she didn't want a receipt and I went in and got the receipt book and she only owed me eighty
((Marie holds her corn, looks intently at Jon))

Jon: mmhm

Marie: n she was real happy about that (pause) ((Marie starts to eat corn, then stops)) She says "no no no no no, *I* don't need a receipt" —

Julie: (Mom look / May I have the )
[

Marie: and just hands me three twenty
(long pause)
((sounds of eating corn on the cob))

Marie: I — took my book — out though cuz she hardly *ever* — makes ((laughing)) mis*takes* — I thought maybe I wrote it wrong but I went back and got three receipts

Adam: (No::) ((to cat))
[

Marie: and they all were

Jon: mhm

Marie: in — you know — what do you call that?

Adam: Daddy, is the (pepper ? )
[

Jon: consecutive order?

Marie: Yeah — mhm

Jon: (Cat) are you hungry — Has he been (fed) today?

In this initial version, Marie views the narrative problem as whether or not Bev was in arrears. Her reported internal response was one of self-doubt, grounded in the belief that Bev hardly ever makes mistakes. In keeping with the 'looking good' constraint, this version reveals Marie as an honest businessperson. The telling thus far provokes minimal involvement from Marie's husband, Jon.

After a considerable interval — 15 minutes of attention to eating, other narrations, etc., alternate reformulations of the Bev-narrative problem emerge in piecemeal fashion. The reformulations grow out of a second narrative about Bev, introduced by Marie, in which Bev is characterized as opportunistic. At this point, Jon is drawn in as an active co-narrator.



*(2-b) Bev Narrative* — 7:35 p.m., Bev/Family Dinner #1, p 43-45

Wherein Jon is elaborating on the second narrative, equating Bev's receiving unwarranted insurance benefits after an accident with the behavior of a customer who gets excessive change back from a grocery clerk.

Jon: you're supposed to think "Hey, that's *great*" and walk out the store ((laughing)) — n she gave me back — *twenty* dollars too much cuz she must've thought I gave her a fifty

Marie: mhm

Jon: you know —

Marie: mm

Jon: and you're not supposed to consider yer — consider whether or not that comes out of her pay if the drawer doesn't balance at the end of the night or=
[

Marie (I know)

Jon: =whether it's the ethic — *RIGHT* thing to do is to say "Hey lady you — you: — gave me too much money"

Marie: ((pointing index finger to Jon, hand extended from elbow)) Well, you know what — you know what though=
[

Jon: it's (*just*) not *in* anymore =

Marie: =I started questioning was the fact she gave me -
[

Jon: =it's gone to even to the extreme?

Marie: *no* — *no*:tice — she just called up after the accident and said

Jon: Yeah "I'm not coming anymore"
[

Marie: "That's it" — no — no two weeks' pay — not =
[ ]

Jon: (Marie)

Marie: =no consideration — (without ever ? )
[

Jon: ((wiping mouth)) She did *all that* when she paid you the three hundred and twenty dollars =
((Marie with hand to mouth, reflective; Julie gets up and goes

to the kitchen))
Jon: =she didn't do that by mistake — she wanted to see how *you* felt about it and she felt she *owed* you
[
Marie: No: way no no no no — no
((Marie shakes head & hand No as well))
[
Jon: Oh no? You don't think so?
Marie: No
Jon: Oh
[
Marie: *She* thought she had not paid me for the month of June — and she's paying me from — the *first* week of June=
[
Jon: eh I would read it — Oh eh
Marie: =to: — the — the ending — the third of
[ ]
Adam?: ( ? )
[
Jon You had *said* that she never made a mistake in the past? though didn't you she was always very — good about that
Marie: ((with index finger pointed out to Jon)) *No* — she she's made one mistake in the past — but=
[
Jon: oh oh huhuh
Marie: =her record i:s — very few mistakes?= ((moves raised finger horizontally to indicate passage of time))
Jon: hmhm (okay)

In the height of portraying Bev as opportunistic, Marie suddenly brings up 'new' information relevant to the initiating event in the first story about Bev, *i.e.* Bev's handing over $320 to Marie. Marie recalls Bev's failure to give two weeks' notice before pulling her daughter out of child care. Jon and Marie now attribute to Bev different intentions concerning the $320 in light of Bev's knowledge of the two weeks' notice requirement. Their discussion prefaces a reconceptualization of the problem embedded in the act of handing over $320.



*(2-c) Bev Narrative* — 7:40 p.m., Bev/Family F dinner #1, p 55-58

The kids have just remembered that Dad had promised them ice cream if they ate a good dinner, and Marie has encouraged them to chant "Haagen Dazs" over and over until Jon submits to taking them to the ice cream store. In the throes of these negotiations, Marie abruptly returns again to the unresolved narrative problem.

Marie: ((head on hand, elbow on table)) You know Jon — I verbally *did* tell Bev two weeks' notice Do you think I shouldov stuck to that? or to have done what I did?
Jon: When I say something I stick to it unless *she*:- s-brings it up. If *I* set a policy and I — and — they=
Jon: ((Adam goes toward living room, bouncing a ball)) =accept that policy — unless *they* have reason to change it and and say=
[
Adam: (Let's go outside and play )
Jon: =something? *I* do not *change* it — I don't *au*tomatically assume "We:ll it's not the *right* thing to do" If I were to *do* that eh - I would be saying in the first place I should never have mentioned it=
((Julie and Eric leave table to join Adam))
Jon: =I should never have set the policy if I didn't believe in it — If I thought it was — a hardship on people I shouldn'a brought it up? — shoulda kept my mouth shut — If *I*: say there's a two weeks' notice required — I automatically charge em for two weeks' notice without thinking twice? about it — I say and it " You — you need — Your pay will include till such and such a date because of the two neek-weeks' notice that's required." I:f *THE:Y* feel hardship it's on *thei:r part — it's — THEIRS* to say "Marie — I really — you know — I didn't expect this to happen 'n I'm sorry ((softly)) I didn't give you two weeks' notice but it was really un-*avoid*able" — a:nd you can say "We:ll — okay I'll split the difference with you — (it's har-) a one week's notice"=
[
Marie: see you know in one way wi- in one (instance)
[

Jon: =and then they s- if they *push* it
Marie: ((pointing to Jon)) she owed me that money — but I just didn't feel right?=
[
Jon: well you're — you
Marie: =taking it on that (principle) cuz she (wanted) — *She* thought she was paying for something that she didn't
[
Jon: You: give her the money and then you let it *bo*ther you then you - then you get all ups-set — You'll be upset for weeks
[
Marie: no no no I'm *not* upset — it's just
((Marie says this calmly but waving of corn cob, then plops corn cob down and raps knuckles on table))
Adam: ((from outside)) *Julie* — go get Spirit [the dog] out
Julie: ((from living room)) Why:?
Marie: I guess I just wish I would have said — I'm not upset with what happened — I just wanted — I think I=
[
Adam: ((from outside)) ( ? )
Marie: =would feel better if I had said something

In this passage, Marie and Jon take the reanalysis of the problem one step further, a step we propose constitutes a paradigm shift. The paradigm shift is a result of problem-solving enriched through co-narration. Jon and Marie's earlier dispute over Bev and the two weeks' notice sets in motion a shift in perspective. The issue of the two weeks' notice has continued to haunt Marie, as indicated by her abrupt re-introduction of the topic. Here Marie emphatically confirms that she did indeed make the two-week rule very explicit to Bev prior to the initiating event. Marie uses this new piece of the setting to reformulate the narrative problem in terms of a new dilemma, namely whether she should have insisted that Bev give her the $320 to compensate for the lack of a two-week notice or should have kept quiet. This reformulation evidences, for us, a paradigm shift, wherein the $320 is now rightfully Marie's and not Bev's. (Marie: "In one instance she owed me that money..."; Jon: "You give her the money...") The reformulation casts Marie's way of responding to Bev's handing her $320 in a new light. Whereas Marie's action of taking out the receipt book and proving that Bev was not in arrears successfully resolved the first



formulation of the narrated problem, the newly formulated definition of the problem makes that action seem inadequate. This inadequacy is articulated by both Marie ("I think I would feel better if I had said something") and Jon ("If *I*: say there's a two weeks' notice required — I automatically charge em for two weeks' notice without thinking twice") and leads to Jon's subsequently chiding Marie for feeling upset.

A critical factor in determining whether or not a detective story takes on the dimensions of a paradigm shift is the uptake of listeners and their willingness to actively enter the narrating process. Our data demonstrate that important missing information surfaces in the throes of collaborative narration. For example, Marie's rather sudden recall of the two-week notice in (2-b) overlaps with Jon's active involvement in assessing Bev's insurance dealings, as if inspired by the energy and support of the collaboration. When a new paradigm is internalized by a narrator, as Marie seems to have internalized the reconstituted problem, we see an exemplar of the Vygotskian passage from interpersonal to intrapersonal knowledge, through co-narration. The presence of family members, apparently facilitated in the more centralized family dinners around a common table, leads to socially accomplished problem-solving and thereby transports narrative co-construction into the arena of joint and individual cognition.

### *C. Social Consequences of Narrative Practices*

It is widely recognized that narratives strengthen social relationships and a general sense of co-membership by providing a medium for illustrating common beliefs, values, and attitudes of tellers and audiences. Research on co-narration demonstrates further that beliefs, values, and attitudes are not so much transmitted from teller to audience as they are collectively and dialogically engendered (see Holquist 1983). Audiences are co-authors and as such co-owners of the narratives and the moral and other premises that these narratives illustrate. They co-own the narrative as an interactional product and more importantly share control over cognitive and verbal tools fundamental to problem-solving itself. Co-ownership is not a relationship that one enters into lightly as it involves sharing control and a commitment however temporary both to the activities of co-narration/co-problem-solving and to the product, *i.e.* the story. For this reason, interlocutors vary the extent and type of their narrative involvement.

Detective stories, particularly paradigm-shifting ones, display considerable cognitive, affective and linguistic involvement from interlocutors. Such extensive involvement structures and restructures social relationships among co-narrators and impacts the balance of power in the social unit. Interlocutors

co-own the story in the sense that they participate in re-perspectizing the fundamental narrative problem. As such, they take on shared responsibility for the story as a product, with or without the invitation of the initial teller. Entitlement to tell a story is thus not the exclusive right of an initial teller (Lerner 1987, Mandelbaum 1987a,1987b). Even those who have not directly experienced the narrative events can acquire entitlement through expanding, querying, correcting, or challenging existing formulations of the narrative problem.

This sharing of narrative 'rights' evidences a sharing of power. At the same time, such sharing makes participants' perceptions of the world vulnerable to co-authored change. In detective stories, the sharing of narrative rights empowers co-present interlocutors to co-author one another's biographies, *i.e.* to construct collectively one party's past experience through co-narration. Such reconstruction (or deconstruction) potentially threatens a teller's drive to 'look good'. It is our hypothesis that this vulnerability serves as a constraint on full-fledged participation in detective storytelling. Whether participants undertake extended 'detecting' appears to be a function of the participants' willingness to commit time and energy and of an initial teller's willingness to risk vulnerability. And that is where the prolonged, centralized dinner may be a last holdout for familial co-authorship. Through the activity of co-authoring detective stories, family members construct perspectives and evoke values. Each exercise of narrative rights and practices reconstitutes family relationships and the family itself as an activity system.

## *III. Concluding Remark*

Collaboration in the form of detective storytelling is akin to scaffolding and joint problem-solving practices characteristic of American middle-class caregiver-child interactions (Ochs & Schieffelin 1984, Wertsch & Hickmann 1987). Such practices empower intimates to influence each other's perceptions of the world and, in so doing, to socialize one another. In our view, the co-narrated detective story is not only a vehicle for the socialization of family values and the family's sense of order/disorder in the world; it is also an object itself of socialization. Children and others sitting at dinner tables and participating in co-narration are being socialized into ways of articulating and solving problems through social construction of a genre. Families who sit together for the duration of a meal have a potential opportunity space for socializing this mode of problem-solving — and certain families do just that, exploiting narratives to co-construct new paradigms which order and reorder their everyday lives.



## NOTES

* This paper is the result of the equal work of the three authors.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Bratman, Michael, *Intention, Plans and Practical Reason.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987, 200pp. $25.00.

Michael Bratman has written a brilliant book — one that makes considerable advances in the theory of action and, as we shall see later, one that unintentionally deepens our knowledge of the foundations of economics. It has my highest recommendation.

This book is about plans, not simply the execution of plans, but also their formation, retention, combination, completion, modification and reconsideration. To a much lesser extent, it is also about the ways in which one individual's plans are constrained by those of other individuals. The focus on plans rests on their importance in the furtherance of human purposes. Since individuals are limited in the extent to which they can deliberate at the moment of action, they must deliberate in advance of their actions. Thus, a plan enables them to extend the power of deliberation. Advance thinking is necessary to coordinate an individual's actions through time. Each act can thereby be seen as a building block in an overall edifice. Committing oneself to future actions now also facilitates coordination of actions across many other individuals who must also think ahead. These others will stand a better chance of knowing what those who engage in related activities will do if there is prior commitment.

Understanding actions in terms of future-directed intentions, rather than simply in terms of desires and beliefs, permits us to appreciate the extended temporality of decisions. Intentions generate intertemporal effects in the form of at least three constraints on subsequent practical reasoning and action. First, the means that ought to be used to implement an intention must be settled upon. Second, incompatibilities between a prior intention and subsequent intentions must be eliminated by modifying one or more plans. Third, revisions or mid-course adjustments must be made in the process of carrying out an intention in response to indications of success or failure along the way. Clearly, intentions guide thought and action through time. They demonstrate that decisions are not "time-slice" outcomes, but processes extended through time (p. 79).

Bratman makes a fundamental distinction between what is intended and what is simply within the *motivational potential* of an intention. This distinction reinforces the intertemporal quality of intentionality. Consider an individual who intends to run a race tomorrow. Although he knows very well that in the process of running he will wear down his sneakers, he does not *intend* to wear