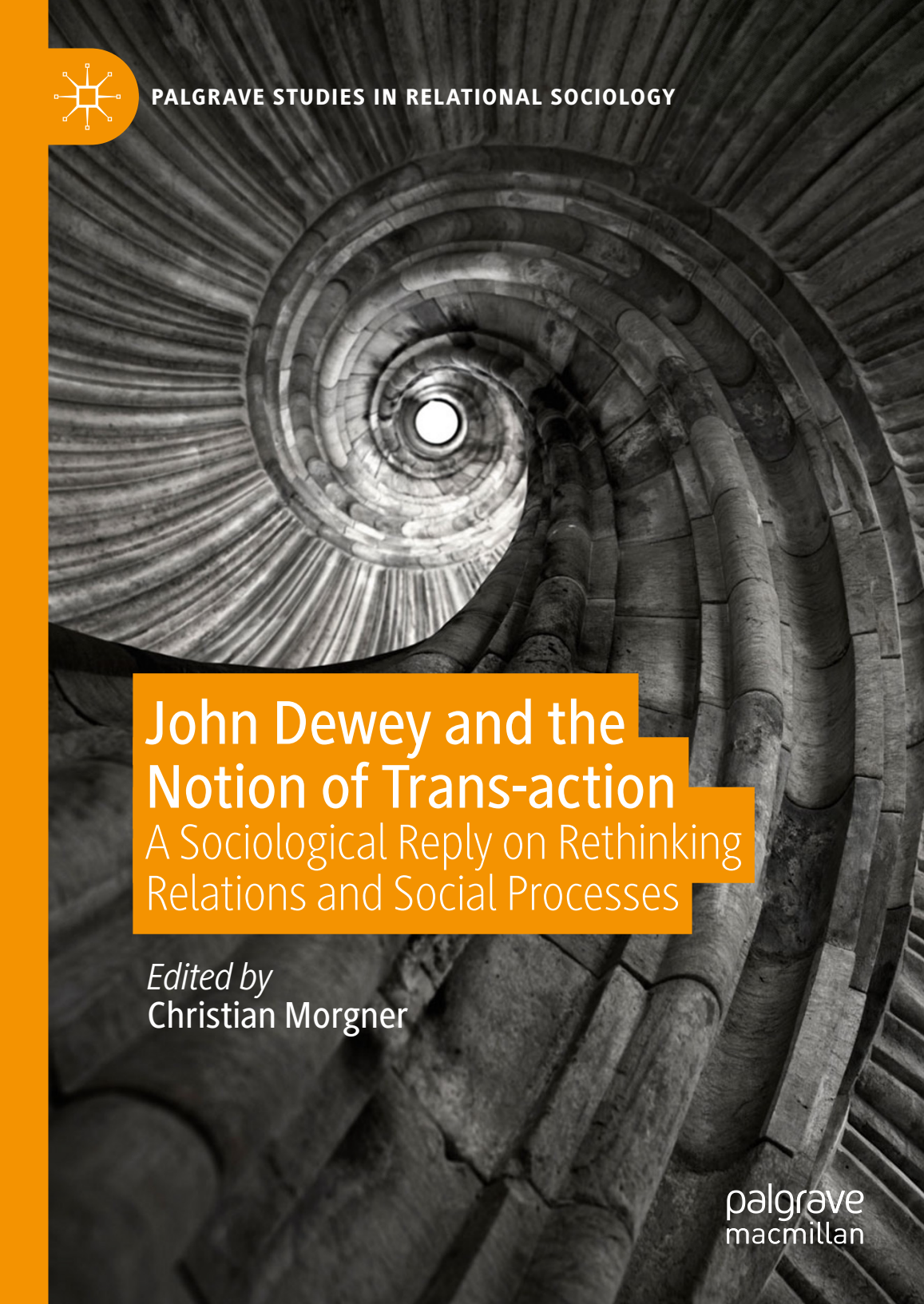
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John Dewey and the Notion of Trans-action
A Sociological Reply on Rethinking Relations and Social Processes
Edited by
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Palgrave Studies in Relational Sociology

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Editor

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CHAPTER 1

Reinventing Social Relations and Processes: John Dewey and Trans-Actions

Christian Morgner

John Dewey, Arthur Bentley and the Concept of Trans-Actions

This book encompasses several emerging and interconnected approaches, including pragmatism, system theory, processual thinking and relational thinking, which work towards a non-ontological or essentialist grounding of sociology. In recent decades, many have observed a 'pragmatic turn', a 'network turn', a 'relational turn' or a 'processual turn' in the social sciences (see, for example, Abbott 2016; Crossley 2010; Donati 2012; Fushe 2015; Pyyhtinen 2016; Dépelteau 2018; Dépelteau and Powell 2013; Powell and Dépelteau 2013; Burkitt 2016). Thanks in part to the works of Charles Tilly, Pierre Bourdieu, Andrew Abbott, Harrison C. White and Niklas Luhmann, researchers using the method of process-tracing in pursuit of meaning and social network analysis among other approaches have contributed to the proliferation of publications related to processual thinking,

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relational sociology, system theory and pragmatism in multiple disciplines and on various topics. The work of John Dewey has been a key influence for many thinkers engaged in this quest for a new approach. Social thinkers, such as Kenneth J. Gergen, Hans Joas, Mustafa Emirbayer and Bruno Latour, for example, have been influenced by the work of the famous American pragmatist. In this sense, this book is the outcome of a growing intellectual movement in philosophy and the social sciences. It offers the opportunity to attain greater specificity with regard to these notions, and to demonstrate why and how we should use them in empirical analysis. In this respect, this book will be of interest to scholars seeking another promising sociology founded on a different mode of perception (and definition) of the 'object' of the social sciences. Evidently, this alone will not change or reinforce these disciplines, but it could be a significant event in a longer chain of interactions and discussions inspired by this goal.

This book is for all social scientists, graduate students and professionals interested in these emerging approaches, and it proposes a very different perspective on social life and social problems. Its focus is on one highly promising—but often misunderstood—concept in philosophy, sociology and other social sciences: the Dewey and Bentley notion of 'transaction'. Briefly, this innovative concept offers the possibility of revisiting and redefining our perception of our social relations and social life by helping us to move beyond views based on mechanical and essentialist notions of 'self-action' and 'inter-action'. It offers a new mode of perception of ourselves, others and the social fields, networks, organizations and institutions in which we make our way through the world.

There is growing sociological interest in incorporating these concepts into current social science and relational thinking. For example, Emirbayer (1997) explored them in his 'relational manifesto', but did not really develop the idea. Recently, and in their own ways, Peeter Selg (2016) and Sarah Hillcoat-Nalletamby (2018) also based their work on the notions of 'trans-action', 'inter-action' and 'self-action'. In one way or another, and more or less explicitly, other relational scholars have also been influenced by John Dewey's and Arthur Bentley's concepts. This publication will be the first collective sociological attempt to discuss and apply the concept of trans-action to various issues and topics, in a context wherein scholars are increasingly beginning to adopt this notion and/or think in terms of social processes and relations. Despite this growing interest, sociology is very much a latecomer in the reception of these ideas. This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part of this chapter, we will introduce the

interdisciplinary reception of this publication in areas that include philosophy, psychology, educational theory, literary studies and political science. This overview is followed by a summary that outlines the concepts of self-action, inter-action and trans-actions. This part will develop a framework that provides an encompassing narrative for the chapters in this volume. This framework will be used in the third part to discuss and connect the chapters of this book as well as their contribution to a new thinking in sociology.

The Concept of Trans-Action: An Interdisciplinary History

The concept of 'trans-action' was first proposed in a book published in 1949 by John Dewey and Arthur J. Bentley, entitled *Knowing and the Known*. Both authors had been in intellectual exchange for almost two decades prior to its publication (see Dewey and Bentley 1964) and some of the book's chapters had already been published in philosophical journals, including *Journal of Philosophy*, *Philosophy of Science* and *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. The book consisted of twelve chapters, with Chapters One, Eight and Nine written by Bentley, Chapter Ten contributed by Dewey, and the remaining chapters written collaboratively. The posthumous publication of Dewey's writings revealed that he had planned to contribute several other chapters to the book. These typescripts are found in his collected works. In this publication, therefore, we will refer to this latest version of *Knowing and the Known* (Dewey and Bentley 1989 [1949]).

The prior publication of some chapters in philosophical journals, as well as the introduction (a critical review of logicians such as Carnap, Cohen, Nagel, Ducasse, Lewis, Morris and Tarski) led to an initial, modest reception, mainly within philosophical circles. Some of the journal publications received technical as well as negative reviews (see Church 1945), and the book was also reviewed on its publication. In the United States, Harold A. Larrabee (1950) was one of the first philosophers to review the book. While he had high praise for Dewey and Bentley, his review did not mention self-action, inter-action or trans-action. The philosopher Sidney Ratner (1950) provided a more detailed review of the book. Ratner acknowledged the two great philosophers who collaborated on this important publication, as well as the timely subjects, for example, the critique of mentalistic, positivistic and realistic approaches to logic. However, he found the book in large

part to be vague and inaccessible. He (1950, p. 249) calls the act of reading the book an 'ardent quest'. However, he also looks favourably upon the concepts of self-action, inter-action and trans-action, saying that the work's impact on the philosophical community will depend significantly on the reception of these concepts. On the other side of the Atlantic, the British philosopher Wolfe Mays (1952) struck an even more negative tone, claiming that Dewey and Bentley's book provided an overview of the 'intellectual ills' of philosophy in the United States presenting 'primarily a variety of old-fashioned pragmatism of the best American vintage' (1952, p. 263). Again, the concepts of self-action, inter-action and trans-action were not mentioned. By this time, philosophical interest in the book had waned.

Despite the lack of a philosophical interest in the book, as early as 1951, Anselm Strauss recommended the book to social psychologists. Strauss highlighted the fact that the experimental psychology of his time separated sign from behaviour and organism from environment, whereas Dewey and Bentley's conceptions of self-action, inter-action and trans-action overcome these fallacies. As a particularly pertinent example, he mentioned the notion of the sign, which Dewey and Bentley conceptualize as an activity that is neither in the organism, in the environment, nor a thing. Other psychologists seem to have agreed with Strauss, because the initial uptake of the book was concentrated in the area of a psychology of learning and perception.

The psychological and psychophysicist theories of perception that dominated research in the 1930s and 1940s framed perception as a simple mediating process. Perception was merely a constant in the transformation of external stimuli received by organisms. These stimuli had to have forms (texture, sound, weight) that could be utilized by the receiving organism. Perception was, in psychological terms, a translation of the characteristic of a pre-existing external world (Bevan 1958). In other words, perception was regarded as an entirely passive affair (Toch and MacLean 1962). The psychological study of media effects in that period seemed to confirm this common-sense understanding. Viewing was passive, and the external would translate itself almost automatically into the mind of the viewer. Thus, the media were seen to exert strong effects and to be capable of easily manipulating behaviour. This paradigm became established as the hypodermic needle theory (also known as the hypodermic-syringe model, transmission-belt model, or magic bullet theory) (see Thibault 2016). The

classic example that seemed to illustrate this case is Orson Welles's radio-play "War of the Worlds". The mass panic incited by the broadcasts suggested that the media could manipulate a passive public, and this understanding shaped perception. Interestingly, this phenomenon was studied by the well-known social psychologist Hadley Cantril (1960, originally published in 1940). However, that Cantril (as well as Kilpatrick, Ames, Ittelson and their circle) became one of the early proponents of a trans-actional psychology is often overlooked (Kilpatrick 1969). This movement questioned the understanding of perception as simple translation or as a passive affair, and became particularly concerned with the separation of action from the individual and perception. They shifted attention from the external stimulus that goes 'into' the organism to the perspective of the action taken by the organism and what it means when the organism perceives (Cantril and Ittelson 1954). To address this question they relied on Dewey and Bentley's conception of trans-action. Cantril and Ittelson (1954) explained that perception cannot be regarded as an independent activity; there is no pure state of perception, and it cannot be studied in isolation. For example, objects cannot be studied independently of perception, but the perceived object must be studied as it is encountered in concrete, real-life situations. The term trans-action is used to develop this line of thinking: 'all parts of the situation enter into it as active participants, and that they owe their very existence as encountered in the situation to this fact of active participation and do not appear as already existing entities merely interacting with each other without affecting their own identity' (Cantril and Ittelson 1954, p. 3). To illustrate this entanglement, Cantril and Ittelson (1954) use baseball as a metaphor in a range of publications. The baseball batter is not independent of the pitcher. Certainly, someone can hit a ball with a batter. However, the type of batter that Cantril and Ittelson are interested in does not exist outside of the baseball game. To study him, it is key to include not only the pitcher, but also the catcher, fielders, teammates, officials, fans, and the rules of the game. Cantril and Ittelson (1954) see the batter as part of this complex trans-action, whereby the batter exists only because of the baseball game in which he or she participates and, likewise, the baseball game itself only exists because of the batter's participation, with each of them owing their existence to their active participation with and through the other players.

Cantril (1957) summarized this insight by saying that perception should not be seen as how we react to stimuli in the environment, but should rather be regarded as a trans-action with the environment. This thinking

was widely influential in the psychology of the 1950 and 1960s. Another notable psychologist who emerged at that time and integrated this thinking was Eric Berne, who applied these ideas in his trans-actional analysis. With the death of Cantril in 1969, research under this labelling waned and became integrated into broader readings on cognition and environment (see Ittelson 1973). However, this new understanding of perception triggered developments in other disciplines during the 1960s and 1970s, most notably in educational theory (Toch and MacLean 1962; Miller 1963) and political sciences (Kriese 1978).

Unlike psychology, which was beset by a specific interest in perception, political science of the late 1960s and early 1970s was shaken by the political turmoil in the Western world, including student protests, ghetto riots, the war in Vietnam, mass media and political influence. Trans-action was thus adopted in a range of sub-fields, including political communication, political opinion research and methodologies for the study of politics (see Landau 1972; Meadow 1980; Nimmo 1978). The changing social landscape seemed to have created the impression that the dominant theoretical approaches that defined politics as an input-output system, based on feedback and homeostasis, presented the political world as too static, consisting of people driven by given and predefined interests and outputs and the effects of such interests' causes (Kress 1966). Trans-action was not simply considered an alternative conceptual tool, but Dewey and Bentley's approach seemed to offer an alternative worldview (Kariel 1970). The static and abstract model of the political system was unable to perceive people in action. For example, political interests were regarded as abstract categories that people possessed and by which they could be grouped accordingly. This Newtonian approach overlooks the reality that interests are a form of trans-action. Interests do not simply pre-exist, but one can only have interests within a relational context; they are an expression of a relationship (for a more detailed discussion on the notion of interests and trans-action, see Kriese 1978). Accordingly, the political should not be seen as a fixed entity, but as a process (Jacobson 1964). Overall, trans-action presented political reality as open-ended, fluid and changing, and avoided the conception of fixed interests, static models and artificial experiments (Weinstein 1973).

Like psychology, educational theory of the 1960s and 1970s sought new ways to approach learning and teaching (see Tagliacozzo et al. 1976; Borghi 1974). Scholars now criticized an understanding of the world that separated knowledge from people's actions as part of an objective world. The external world was pre-existing and valid in itself. Learning was thus

based on a stimulus-response model, with the teacher acting as an instructor and the pupil receiving this knowledge. This perspective ignored the reality of human consciousness in terms of convention, habit and experience. The objective world model applied a dualistic Newtonian approach, whereby the world is held to be static and non-developmental. The world is an assemblage of facts that must be taught as an extension of what already exists. Education is thus conceived as a means of enabling people to adjust to an unchanging, objective world that is external to them. Teaching is a means of adjustment that involves the direct transmission of objective knowledge and skills to a passive learner, who must mirror this external world. Teaching therefore focuses on the memorization of facts, discipline and instruction of skills. Educational theory during the first half of the twentieth century emphasized tests, efficiency and vocational education as the main tools of adjustment (see Callahan 1962;Wirth 1972). Dewey and Bentley's notion of trans-action offered a different approach to this thinking. It certainly helped that Dewey himself was active in educational reform and had published on this subject (see Barton 1964; Suchodolski 1979). Educational theory, inspired by the notion of trans-action, suggested abandoning the idea that knowledge is a kind of substance that can be imparted and acquired, while emphasizing the active relationship between the knower and the known. Learning, it was argued, should be considered as imputing meaning to situations, events and people, and then responding to this meaning based upon what the knowers have invested or projected in them (Frank 1959). Education had to shift from the conception of an external world that had to be filled into a blank mind to a more reflexive relationship wherein the learner was learning simply to learn (Buktenica 1977). The teacher's role should not be considered as an instructor of knowledge, but rather to help children to relate cognitively to the world in their own individual ways (Rosenblatt 1968). Learning would be seen as a 'cooperative transaction of inquiry' (Clapp 1952, p. xi). This understanding impacted on a range of other contemporary educational policies, for example, the need to reform the understanding and even use of the term 'punishment' in schools (Thomas 1968), and to re-consider the function and role of educational interventions (Dokecki et al. 1972) as based on a trans-actional approach. While psychological theories of perception stressed that cognition must be regarded as an activity—as a trans-action with the environment—educational theory emphasized the need to understand teaching and learning as cooperative activities with a view to individual development and understanding of the world. This perspective

paved the way for yet another development in the reception of Dewey and Bentley's notion of trans-action within the arts and humanities during the 1980s. Trans-action became an influential term for new theories of literary reading and literary approaches to the interpretation of texts. Terry Eagleton (1983) remarked that Romantic preoccupations with the author had dominated early twentieth-century literary theory. Critical concerns during the 1920s had shifted attention to the text and developments since the 1970s through the 1980s directed greater attention towards the reader. It was in this context that a range of new reader-response theories that stressed the active role of the reader emerged (Beach 1993). Among these theories, it is the work of Louise Rosenblatt (others include I. A. Richards, D. W. Harding, James Britton, Walter Scatoff, and Norman Holland) that was most vocal in applying a trans-actional approach to literary reading (see Connell 2008; Calderwood 2005). Rosenblatt criticized the fact that few theories of reading during the 1970s and 1980s supported a view of the text as a ready-made product that would be imprinted on the blank tape of the reader's mind. However, in the context of literary reading, she believed that the text is still assumed to be all important and determines what the outcome for the reader will be. However, her research demonstrated that, although the text is important, meaning does not come into being simply because the text contains a narrative or rhythm, nor is meaning invoked through the reader's ability to give a lexical definition of a word. She concluded that the meaning of 'literariness' could not be relegated to the text (Rosenblatt 1978). Reading must be considered a trans-action that involves a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances. Dewey and Bentley's notion of trans-action is used within their consideration that the typical separation between the observer and that which is observed should be avoided, and that the observer and observed should be regarded as in close organization. Rosenblatt implemented this idea such that the reader's past experience of language establishes a framework to fit the ideas that arise as words in a text are encountered. Further readings may lead to revisions of what does and does not fit, thereby opening up new possibilities for the text to follow. Consequently, reading implies selection from possibilities offered by their text and their constant reorganization into meaning. For Rosenblatt, this approach differentiates her trans-actional literary theory from an interactional response theory. An interactional approach emphasizes information processing, resting on a mechanical view, whereby the reader is a passive observer who discovers fixed meanings within a text. The trans-actional perspective suggests

that the reader assumes a much more active role in constructing meaning, whereby reading entails a stream of selections, syntheses and accompanying reactions that construct meaning. Based on this consideration, she criticized the understanding of literature in her time as suffering from a failure to recognize that a literary work, as an object of interpretation, appreciation and analysis, is an evocation through a reader-text trans-action. This thinking proved to be influential not only to later generations of literary theories (Connell 2008), but was also adapted in other arts-related disciplines, such as composition (Fishman 1993) and museum studies (Latham 2007).

By the early 1990s, notions of learning, perception and communication had to a certain extent integrated these ideas. For example, new trends in organizational and administrative theory, which were dissatisfied with models of organizational change, adapted Dewey and Bentley's ideas within a context of organizational learning (Elkjaer 2003). Other approaches, mainly in the area of intuitional economics, which aimed to overcome neoclassical theories of behavioural economics, stressed the trans-actional dimension of context and behaviour (Khalil 2003). While some sociologists had on occasion referred to trans-action (the strongest impact was perhaps in the area of pragmatist sociologies, see Shalin 1986), it is fair to say that sociology is something of a latecomer in this reception. It is within the context of an emerging 'relational sociology' that the term trans-action now finds interested readers (Dépelteau 2018). This publication intends to fill this gap by providing the first collective sociological discussion of the concept of trans-action. As this brief overview reveals, there is significant potential for the papers presented in this publication to contribute to a broader cross-disciplinary debate that discusses the mutual benefits of the trans-action concept, not only for sociology, but also psychology, management, education and psychology, as well as arts and humanities.

Self-Action, Inter-Action and Trans-Action

In 1949, John Dewey and Arthur Bentley published the book *Knowing and the Known*. This volume assembled a series of papers that had previously been published between 1945 and 1948; some were specifically written for the book's publication while others appeared posthumously. *Knowing and the Known* grew out of a collaboration and correspondence that Dewey and Bentley engaged in from 1932 to 1951. A selection of this correspondence has been published under the title: *John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley: A Philosophical Correspondence, 1932–1951* (herein cited as Dewey

and Bentley 1964). This collaboration developed during the late stages of their careers and lives: Bentley was 62 and Dewey was already 72 when the correspondence began, and it only ended in 1952 when Dewey died at the age of 92. However, this late collaboration resulted from both authors having developed similar ideas in the preceding years. Dewey himself said that the exchange between them resulted from a 'process of independent maturing for some forty years' (Dewey and Bentley 1964, p. 116). They had developed a thinking that had not yet coined the term trans-action, but which represented a like-mindedness despite the authors' backgrounds in different intellectual traditions.

Dewey was trained in philosophy. He had completed his Ph.D. at John Hopkins University, where he met George Sylvester Morris, Charles Sanders Peirce, Herbert Baxter Adams and G. Stanley Hall. In 1894, he joined the newly founded University of Chicago, with its distinctive focus on philosophical pragmatism. His research interests were wide-ranging, and he published in the fields of psychology, educational theory, aesthetics, socio-political philosophy, theory of the religious and general theory of value. Despite his wide-ranging interests, the themes that would become central to *Knowing and the Known*—and thus to his collaboration with Bentley—are already present in his early works, and quite possibly in one of his most significant writings 'The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology' published in 1896 (here cited as Dewey 1972 [1896]). In this paper, Dewey criticized the dominant psychological thinking of his time, that which he called the 'reflex arc'. Psychology of this period was, according to Dewey, invested in a dualism that separated body and mind, and separated sensory stimuli from thinking (ideation) and subsequent bodily responses. He criticized psychology's foundations in the old dualism of body and soul that 'finds a distinct echo in the current dualism of stimulus and response' (Dewey 1972 [1896], p. 96). His central concern with the stimulus-response model is the implicit assumption of an isolated, independent and passive organism that simply reacts to external stimuli. According to Dewey, this line of thought completely ignores an ever-active organism that is not awoken from its inactivity through being stimulated. As stimuli are therefore never stimuli to action as such, they are not independently existing entities and therefore must be understood within a 'single concrete whole' (Dewey 1972 [1896], p. 97). Dewey elaborates on the difference between this thinking and the psychology of his time with the example of a child that reaches for a candle and gets burned. According to Dewey (1972 [1896], p. 97), a dualistic psychology explains this phenomenon that 'the sensation

of light is a stimulus to the grasping as a response, the burn resulting is a stimulus to withdrawing the hand as response and so on'. However, based on Dewey's viewpoint, the explanation falls short if it begins with the sensation of light as the stimulus for this behaviour. The child must already be able to see the candles; it must be actively looking, which requires the relevant head and eye movements, which in turn guides the child in reaching for the candle, based on where it is located. The seeing and reaching operate closely together. They are not separate units, but unfold in a sequence of mutually adjusting acts. Neither the stimulus nor the response is external to the act, but they are 'always inside a co-ordination and have their significance purely from the part played in maintaining or reconstituting the co-ordination' (Dewey 1972 [1896], p. 99). Stimulus and response are aspects of the 'next act' (Dewey 1972 [1896], p. 107). The stimulus is therefore something that the organism must actively pursue, it has 'to be made out' (Dewey 1972 [1896], p. 109) so as to adjust accordingly. However, Dewey is not only critical of a realism that assumes a world independent of the organism, but also wishes to overcome an idealism that restricts experience to the subject. The stimulus is, according to Dewey, not invented, and nor has it an external and directly determining quality: 'The stimulus is that phase of the forming co-ordination which represents the conditions which have to be met in bringing it to a successful issue; the response is that phase of one and the same forming co-ordination which gives the key to meeting these conditions, which serves as instrument in effecting the successful co-ordination. They are therefore strictly correlative and contemporaneous' (Dewey 1972 [1896], p. 109).

Dewey's career, education and intellectual oeuvre have received far greater attention than Arthur Bentley's have. Both of their careers began in similar fashions. Bentley also studied at John Hopkins University. In 1895, he also took up a position at the newly formed University of Chicago. Bentley's interests at that time lay more in economics and sociology, but he also encountered the work of Dewey and other pragmatists. Bentley was unable to stay at the University of Chicago and continued his career as a newspaper reporter in Chicago. It was during that period that he collected the empirical material that led to the publication of *The Process of Government* published in 1908 (here cited as Bentley 1908). The word 'process' signals that Bentley was already seeking to provide a more dynamic conception of politics that rejects psychological narratives that employ a strictly causal narrative as well as common-sense explanations of human behaviour. The

political theories of his time are concerned with 'soul-stuff', personal qualities that are looked upon as having thing-like qualities and that determine and therefore explain social behaviour. These personal qualities and motivations for social behaviour are based on 'human wants'. These subjective qualities are used to explain institutions' seemingly objective statuses. An example of a human want is the desire for security, which translates into the creation of legal structures or the feeling of sympathy that lies at the foundation of society and translates into equal forms of cooperation and representation. These inborn feelings and wants are used by individuals to create society. Consequently, feelings are seen as causes of social behaviour. Bentley does not deny that people may have different cognitive qualities, that they may see and feel things differently: 'What I am asserting is that the attempt to erect it into a causal interpretation of society on the basis of fixed individual characters which can adequately be described and defined apart from the society they explain, is a hotbed of confusion and irrelevancy' (Bentley 1908, p. 109). Likewise, he is concerned with sociological approaches that treat ideas as social facts, citing Durkheim as one of the representatives of this thinking (Bentley 1908, p. 119). Whereas feelings, wants and desires are causes within the individual, ideas are built up as things in the environment of the individual and are 'supposed to explain the social doings of the individual' (Bentley 1908, p. 123). Once ideas are formed in the process of evolution, they behave like external entities that exert their own force on social action, that is, they act as external stimuli that cause social behaviour. Bentley uses the example of humanitarianism to explain 'the abolition of the whipping-post for women, of the pillory, of spring guns, of state lotteries, and of the slave trade' (Bentley 1908, p. 144). The ideal of humanitarianism overcomes forms of hatred and suffering, which in turn causes behavioural changes. However, Bentley questions which general ideals have only selected a few forms of suffering and oppression and have not eliminated many others. He concludes that feelings, faculties, and ideas are not definitive things that act behind society, driving or even causing social behaviour, but that they are 'society itself' (Bentley 1908, p. 166). They should be seen as phases of social situations that 'stand out as phases moreover, only with reference to certain positions in the social situation or complex of situations in the widest sense, within which they themselves exist' (Bentley 1908, p. 170). It is from here that Bentley draws several conclusions that are similar to those reached by Dewey. Regarding the role of knowledge, he writes that there is no independent inner or outer world. We do not know such a world 'except a world

that is known to us … as it is known to us' (Bentley 1908, p. 170). Concerning the empirical study of human behaviour, it cannot be restricted to 'one man by himself, it cannot even be stated by adding man to man. It must be taken as it comes in many men together' (Bentley 1908, p. 176). He subsequently concludes that sociological research must concern itself with the '"relation" between men' (Bentley 1908, p. 176). However, this relation should not be understood in the sense that individuals are pre-existing and that relations subsequently form between them. 'The "relation" is the given phenomenon, the raw material; the action of men with or upon each other. We know men only as participants in such activity' (Bentley 1908, 176). As mentioned earlier, Bentley's emphasis is on a dynamic conception of politics as a process or as a becoming, arguing that the participants in activity are not single units, because 'the activities are interlaced. That, however, is a bad manner of expression. For the interlacing itself is the activity' (Bentley 1908, p. 178). The analysis of government therefore requires that it be studied as 'one great moving process … and of this great moving process it is impossible to state any part except as valued in terms of the other parts' (Bentley 1908, p. 178).[1]

Neither Dewey nor Bentley used terms such as self-action, inter-action or trans-action in these early writings. However, their intellectual endeavours shared similar aspirations, with an emphasis on overcoming ontological models of human behaviour to avoid a thinking based on external determining realities. They stressed the relational role of meaning-making. Despite these striking similarities, it would be another thirty years before the

[1]The 'raw material' for the study of this process is to be found in the 'actually performed legislating-administering-adjudicating activities' (Bentley 1908, p. 180). The relational aspect of his study on the government is expressed through (interest) groups. It is unfortunate that the reception of Bentley has solely focused on this aspect, that he has been praised for discovering interest groups, but mainly by seeing groups as pre-existing social units (see Truman 1951). The relational approach presented in this book would argue that Bentley presents a perspective of government that aligns with contemporary ideas in dynamic network theory. Groups are for Bentley (1908, p. 206) people in action that do not exist independently of others (Bentley 1908, p. 217): 'No group has meaning except in its relations to other groups' Government is therefore not made-up of people, but is to be seen as 'a certain network of activities' (Bentley 1908, p. 261). Such a network is not static, for instance, relations between groups as in a Euclidean space. The government as process is shaped by 'groups pressing one another, forming one another, and pushing out new groups and group representatives (the organs or agencies of government) to mediate the adjustments' (Bentley 1908, p. 269). Perhaps it is time to revisit the work of Arthur Bentley from such a more contemporary perspective.

authors would engage in a direct conversation, beginning in 1935. In the conversation that emerged, both authors expressed their views in favour of a trans-actional perspective (Dewey and Bentley 1964, p. 483).[2] However, they recognized that, despite their similar agendas, the theoretical terminology that they employed were not firmly established. Bentley suggested that a 'firming-up of names' was required, so as to clarify the distinction between their approach and the existing philosophical thinking. The 'hedging' as he writes 'brought not fruit', and they must 'holler away' (Dewey and Bentley 1964, p. 206). This view seemed to be reinforced by the impression that the fundamental insights developed by both authors was not communicated very well to the audiences that they wished to address. They needed to articulate their vision through a more coherent approach (as Bentley put it, 'to see how the sentences hang together', Dewey and Bentley [1964, p. 99]), which made it necessary to find common ground despite their different orientations. Their correspondence raised issues around how they described their own observations through the vocabulary of the other and how to firm up their terminology and avoid endless cycles of reviewing it (Dewey and Bentley 1964, pp. 68, 206). Bentley tended to stress the need for precision to express a line of thought, whereas Dewey emphasized the exploitation of an idea of a more practical usage that avoided finished formulations. In a way, they had to find a solution as to how to clearly express the notion of trans-action, but at the same time to avoid a narrative that presented trans-action not as a finality, as a closed or absolute concept, but to retain its somewhat fluid and dynamic meaning. On the one hand, this led to terms such as knowledge and knowing, while on the other hand, it also led to a very different writing and organization of the book. The linearity of the writing may create the impression of a certain beginning leading to a conclusive end. However, in *Knowing and the Known*, Dewey and Bentley experiment with that, in combining a kind of glossary writing with long footnotes, provisions of formulations that are later revised in the text, excerpts and a kind of Wittgenstein-style formulaic that gives the reader the impression of wandering through a hypertext. As such, it is interesting to note that the key term, trans-action, is not presented at the beginning of the book nor at the end, as if this term would be the beginning or conclusive end. All terminology relevant for this publication is found closer the middle, in Chapters 4 and 5.

[2] Sidney Ratner's introduction to the Correspondence (Dewey and Bentley 1964) sketches the intellectual careers of both authors until they eventually crossed.

Dewey and Bentley introduce the term trans-action to set themselves apart from common epistemologies as well as the psychological conceptions that make a radical separation between the observed and the observer. Dewey and Bentley (1989 [1949], p. 96), propose that the 'observer and observed are held in close organization'. Trans-action is introduced to express that they do not believe that the observed exists apart from any observation, nor that the observed exists only in someone's mind independent of what is actually observed. Trans-action is thus 'unfractured observation' (Dewey and Bentley 1989 [1949], p. 97). It is considered a process of the full situation of observer and observed, which is a situation that is before us within the observer and likewise is a situation in which observations themselves arise.

This line of thinking is itself a result of evolution and only gained a 'clean status' during the nineteenth century, particularly in physics, according to Dewey and Bentley achieved prominence in the growth of knowledge. Previous societies relied on different conceptions of relational views of action, which Dewey and Bentley (1989 [1949], p. 101), define as self-action and inter-action. They illustrate the different uses of these terms in the case of scientific evolution, particularly physics.[3] In ancient Greek thought, Aristotle's physics were built on the idea of substances, essences and entities. According to Dewey and Bentley's reading of his physics, Aristotle proposed the existence of things, which have their own being. They continue to exist under their own power—for example, the movement of stars. This line of thought encapsulates the notion of self-action. Galileo was the first person to raise doubts about this conception. He deviated from the Aristotelian view that force must be applied to put and keep an inert object in motion. His analysis of ascending and descending planes, together with his observation of the acceleration of falling weight as well as weight tossed upwards, led him to the conclusion that a mass once set in motion continues in a straight line unless interfered with by another mass. Continued motion does not rely on the push of an 'actor'. Isaac Newton expanded this conception and viewed space and time as fixed constants in which forces operated between unchangeable particles. Both Galileo's and Newton's physics were based on an idea of inter-acting particles. Einstein's physics brought time and space into the investigation. This approach

[3] Dewey and Bentley (1989 [1949], pp. 116–121) present a similar evolutionary overview in the case of physiology. This perspective provides some very interesting insight into modern conceptions of ecology and nature (see in particular pp. 120–121).

synthesized the particle with space and time, all of which had been considered separate. This thinking overcomes the perception of energy as thing, the path of light as cause and effect, but perhaps most importantly integrates the particle into space and time. It is in Einstein's physics that the trans-actional approach becomes most evident (other proponents include Maxwell and Niels Bohr). This evolution of physics from the perspective of relational notions of action is not only relevant to historical descriptions of changing conceptual frameworks in the sciences, but also leads to a mode of inquiry called 'transactional observation' (Dewey and Bentley 1989 [1949], pp. 113–115). Trans-actional observation views existing descriptions and events as tentative and preliminary. It proceeds with the freedom of re-determination and re-naming. This circular research process shares similarities with circular methodologies, such as grounded theory and action research. Furthermore, trans-actional observations do not view 'facts' as separate entities, but hold that they should be seen as part of the process of observation. Some contemporary research methodologies might say that data cannot exist independently of the observer, but that whether something is regarded as data depends on the observer. Finally, trans-actional observations do not view 'action' as an observable thing, as in the older version of self-action that viewed knowledge contained in a person as a cause or inter-action, but 'is a procedure which observes men talking and writing, with their world-behaviors and other representational activities connected with their thing-perceivings and manipulations', it looks at the 'whole process', at whatever may be called 'inners' and 'outers' (Dewey and Bentley 1989 [1949], p. 115). Such a view bears close resemblance with methodologies employed in actor-network theory or more recent developments in Posthumanism.

As mentioned above, Dewey and Bentley linked the emergence of trans-actional observation to evolutionary changes in society. Moreover, they not only traced this development in physics and physiology, but also suggested that the different relational conceptions of action are related to different structures of society. The notion of self-action is associated with Greek antiquity and the Middle Ages. For example, the Aristotelian explanation of slavery operates according to a notion of self-action: slaves are slaves by nature, whereas others are born to be free. So, Aristotle (1885) writes in his *Politics* (I, 5): 'From the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule. …He who participates in reason enough to apprehend, but not to have, reason, is a slave by nature'. Likewise, Plato is cited by Dewey (2005, pp. 257–258) as an example, on the basis that his

division of souls explains the communal life of his day: 'Plato discriminated the sensuously appetitive and acquisitive faculties, exhibited by the mercantile class, the "spirited" faculty, that of generous outgoing impulse and will, that he noted in citizen-soldiers loyal to law and right belief, even at the expense of their personal existence, and the rational faculty he observed in those who were fit for the making of laws'. Christianity of the Middle Ages also operated with the concept of self-action in the form of the human soul (Dewey and Bentley 1989 [1949], p. 124). Self-action establishes a knower 'in person'. These notions of the soul have survived somewhat in more modern conceptions of the mind and actor. The inter-actional view came about with the Newtonian mechanic thinking of constant motion as not interfered with by other motions. Perhaps the earliest adaptation of this thinking and application in major social theory that made a break with the Aristotelian worldview was expressed by Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes was familiar with Newton's laws of motion, which influenced his views in overcoming the Aristotelian view of self-action, which perceives action as the result of a continuous application of force. For Hobbes, action was closely intertwined with motion. It is the agent who acts, who is put into motion, who is moved (Hobbes 1839, p. 417). Once set in motion, action is only altered through a motion that is contrary to that of the first agent. What sets an action in motion or activates a passive body, according to Hobbes, is the will or desire to survive. However, this basic instinct sets a linear path that will cause its inter-action with those of other actors that experience the same drive. According to Hobbes, in this natural state, these inter-actions will result in a war against all. This notion of reaction against action has become a common trope had fascinated later generations of sociologists. Rational choice and game theory[4] are among the key approaches that have implemented this line of thinking (see Neal 1988).

The trans-actional approach is a more recent development (Dewey and Bentley 1989 [1949], p. 127). In this modern world, there is no longer a knower to know it as it is, a knower superior to all knowledge, a knower beyond and outside time and space. Under such conditions, life is open to revision; it has a contingent quality, and there is a certain 'what if?' about it (Dewey and Bentley 1989 [1949], p. 74). Meaning does not derive from an outside world, nor from an extramundus actor. In the modern world,

[4]It is an interesting coincidence that Dewey and Bentley (1989 [1949], p. 126) use the idea of the game and financial exchange to illustrate inter-action.

the actor can only be considered in terms of trans-action. There is no 'businessman' without him participating in business. Consequently, Dewey and Bentley (1989 [1949], p. 51), regard trans-actional observation as 'man-in-action', as action of and in the world and not as something set against an environing world, not merely acting 'in' a world (see, for example, the treatment of water from such a perspective; Dewey and Bentley 1989 [1949], p. 291). The epistemological consequences of such a conception mean that the notion of trans-action has been enabled by a trans-actional view. In other words, Dewey and Bentley's trans-actional writings are themselves writings of and in this world. The production of meaning thus has a circular structure (Dewey and Bentley 1989 [1949], pp. 62, 260).

Summarizing his overview of the notions of trans-action, self-action and inter-action and where they have come from, it can be said that each refers to a specific mode of observation of relations between entities. The contributors to this volume will interpret these concepts within the wider debate on relational, non-ontological sociology. In such a context, self-actions of A on B, where actor A (actor, thing) is independent of B and where actor B is structurally determined by A. Older positivistic sociologies, such as that of August Comte but also Herbert Spencer, employ such unidirectional views of behaviour. It is, perhaps, also found in popular conceptions of extra-ordinary people, such as certain artists, scientists and intellectuals (see Pronko and Herman 1982). Sociological approaches that incorporate a co-deterministic perspective employ the notion of inter-action. Here, actors A and B, each are based on properties (needs, feelings, ideas) that are independent of the relations between them. This model of colliding forces is strongly expressed in the different variants of methodological individualism. Individuals' preferences, typically seen as rational and profit-maximizing, are treated as given by neoclassical economists. These individuals engage in interactions with others and it is from the perspective of profitmaking that individuals co-determine the behaviour of others. As such, institutions, norms and social structures are aggregates of such co-deterministic interactions. A and B trans-act, which means that neither actor A nor actor B can be viewed as independent of the relationship. Dewey and Bentley (1989 [1949], p. 125) provide an illustration of this viewpoint:

> If we watch a hunter with his gun go into a field where he sees a small animal already known to him by name as a rabbit, then, within the framework of half an hour and an acre of land, it is easy—and for immediate purposes satisfactory enough—to report the shooting that follows in an interactional form