



Mind As Action

By James V. Wertsch

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Contemporary social problems typically involve many complex, interrelated dimensions--psychological, cultural, and institutional, among others. But today, the social sciences have fragmented into isolated disciplines lacking a common language, and analyses of social problems have polarized into approaches that focus on an individual's mental functioning over social settings, or vice versa. In *Mind as Action*, James V. Wertsch argues that current approaches to social issues have been blinded by the narrow confines of increasing specialization in the social sciences. In response to this conceptual blindness, he proposes a method of sociocultural analysis that connects the various perspectives of the social sciences in an integrated, nonreductive fashion. Wertsch maintains that we can use mediated action, which he defines as the irreducible tension between active agents and cultural tools, as a productive method of explicating the complicated relationships between human action and its manifold cultural, institutional, and historical contexts. Drawing on the ideas of Lev Vygotsky, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Kenneth Burke, as well as research from various fields, this book traces the implications of mediated action for a sociocultural analysis of the mind, as well as for some of today's most pressing social issues. Wertsch's investigation of forms of mediated action such as stereotypes and historical narratives provide valuable new insights into issues such as the mastery, appropriation, and resistance of culture. By providing an analytic unit that has the possibility of operating at the crossroads of various disciplines, *Mind as Action* will be important reading for academics, students, and researchers in psychology, linguistics, cognitive science, sociology, literary analysis, and philosophy.

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In *Mind as Action*, James V. Wertsch argues that current approaches to social issues have been blinded by the narrow confines of increasing specialization in the social sciences. In response to this conceptual blindness, he proposes a method of sociocultural analysis that connects the various perspectives of the social sciences in an integrated, nonreductive fashion. Wertsch maintains that we can use mediated action, which he defines as the irreducible tension between active agents and cultural tools, as a productive method of explicating the complicated relationships between human action and its manifold cultural, institutional, and historical contexts. Drawing on the ideas of Lev Vygotsky, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Kenneth Burke, as well as research from various fields, this book traces the implications of mediated action for a sociocultural analysis of the mind, as well as for some of today's most pressing social issues. Wertsch's investigation of forms of mediated action such as stereotypes and historical narratives provide valuable new insights into issues such as the mastery, appropriation, and resistance of culture. By providing an analytic unit that has the possibility of operating at the crossroads of various disciplines, *Mind as Action* will be important reading for academics, students, and researchers in psychology, linguistics, cognitive science, sociology, literary analysis, and philosophy.

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Editorial Review

Review

"For all of us in psychology (cognitive or cultural) and education, it's tempting to avoid hard to understand relationships for example, between subjective agency and objective cultural tools, internalization and appropriation, creativity and conventions. Drawing on literary theorist Kenneth Burke as well as more familiar Bakhtin and Vygotsky, Wertsch shows us why we can't either avoid these issues, or resolve them neatly on one side or the other. With rich examples from teaching and curriculum, he simply won't let us off the hook."--Courtney Cazden, *Harvard Graduate School of Education*

"Jim Wertsch's *Mind as Action* carries the study of mind in relation to its cultural, institutional, and historical contexts into important new territory. Must reading for anyone interested in sociocultural approaches to human nature."--Mike Cole, *Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, University of California, La Jolla*

About the Author

James V. Wertsch is Professor and Chair of the Department of Education at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri.

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