**A Therapeutic Deconstruction of the Illusion of Self**

**Fred Newman**

*In this presentation—the opening session of the 1998 Spring Training Institute of the East Side Institute for Short Term Psychotherapy--Newman gives a personal account of his thirty-year "search for method" as a psychotherapist. In sharing the origins and methodological turning points in the development of social therapy, he tells the story of how and why language became the subject of intense intellectual debate during this century. He revisits the birth, substance, achievements and limitations of positivism, analytic philosophy and ordinary language philosophy. More a dramatization than a formal lecture, Newman plays multiple roles, including Descartes, Wittgenstein and Vygotsky, while always performing himself.*

I'm a little intimidated by my own title which rings rather academic. But coming up with that title has been of value to me, because it's made me think about some things that I haven't thought about in this particular way for a long time. So let me share with you what the title is about and maybe, if we can comprehend the title together, we'll have made some kind of step forward.

There is something of a contradiction in our talking about this, however, since the point that I'm eager to make is that any kind of serious deconstruction of the illusion of self is going to be a therapeutic deconstruction and, since we're not doing therapy together, one might reasonably ask, "Well, how could you possibly do what it is that the title suggests you're going to do?" And the answer is, I can't.

As some of you know, I was formally trained in philosophy, not in psychology. I started out in philosophy in the 1950s in what's called analytic philosophy at a moment when it was just coming into being. In some respects, analytic philosophy was doing what's now called deconstruction long before there was any concept of deconstruction. Postmodernism was really not yet around, and everyone then thought about themselves as modernists (insofar as people thought about this at all) - it was kind of "cool" to be modern. In my lifetime things have gone from being cool to be modern to being a disgrace to be modern.

Philosophy has gone through a profound transformation in the course of the twentieth century. For centuries, it was the study of "great ideas" and "big questions"—conceptions like "the good," "knowing," "life" and "meaning." Then, at the end of the nineteenth century, due to the work of many different people in philosophy and other fields (especially linguistics, anthropology and sociology), there emerged a shift in what studying and learning in general were all about. As a part of that, there occurred a significant shift in what philosophy was about. The centuries-old notion that somehow ideas could be abstractly studied or abstractly understood—in a sense, the very essence or philosophy—came under severe critique.

This shift encompassed many different movements, which, for lack of a better term, we could call positivism. Both its late-nineteenth-century and twentieth-century versions (which was known as logical positivism) opened up the question of whether the study of ideas by this abstract method, which has been part of a Western heritage (and in some respects an Eastern heritage as well) for two thousand years, was worthless, was fruitless, was ridiculous, was—to use the term that was most used by these positivists—meaningless. Stated in its most extreme form, the positivistic critique went something like this: Philosophy may be nothing more than a certain grouping of human beings called Philosophers who, while on the payroll of universities and colleges throughout the world, utter certain words. These words they utter when they are doing philosophy are essentially empty, abstract and meaningless. They are, in effect, nonsensical, but they have the illusion of meaning something (at least amongst the "chosen," that is, the Philosophers). Positivism raised the question of whether philosophy—thousands of years of activity, trillions and trillions of words—ultimately meant nothing at all.

From the very outset of my training in philosophy I had always been a little suspicious of philosophy, so I was somewhat sympathetic to the positivists' argument, even though I was learning this trade and becoming a Philosopher. I had come out of a relatively poor, working-class background. No one in my family had ever graduated high school, much less graduated college, much less gotten a Ph.D. I had apprenticed as a machinist when I was a young man, and was headed for a lifetime of work in machine shops. Then, for a variety of reasons, including the opportunity opened up by the G.I. Bill, I managed to get into college and started taking courses. And it occurred to me that if I was going to go to college then the thing I wanted most of all was to find a subject which was as utterly and completely impractical as possible. If my journey at the time was getting away from the practicality of machine shops and that kind of difficult, laboring work, I thought I should find something that had nothing to do with machine-work, that had nothing to do with anything even close to machine-work, indeed, that had nothing to do with reality and the world at all. I was looking to get away from it all. I went to undergraduate school at City College and spent three and a half years trying to find the way to do absolutely nothing and get paid for it, and philosophy turned out to be that way of life.

I went to graduate school at Stanford just at the time when some very high-powered people had been hired (who have since become some of the dominant American philosophers of the latter part of this century) and the university was becoming a primary center of analytic philosophy. I actually associate this shift with a specific moment in time, the strange way we identify a phenomenon of this sort with a certain date, like one might say, "War broke out July 3rd" in spite of the fact that these kinds of things happen gradually. But that wasn't my experience. Between the time I finished at City College in December 1959 and drove out to California over the course of a month to start at Stanford, my experience was that everyone suddenly stopped studying philosophy and started studying language. I sort of have the feeling that there was this mass meeting that I didn't attend while I was driving to California, where everyone made an agreement to change the subject matter. So when I got to California, it no longer seemed as if I was studying the same thing that I'd been studying those years at City College. I had originally gone to-Stanford to study Eastern philosophy with David Nivison, a leading scholar in Asian Studies, on the recommendation of one of my City College professors. Over the summer, Nivison had decided to abandon Asian philosophy altogether and start doing analytic philosophy. So I get out there, and he says, "I'm glad you came, but I'm going to do analytic philosophy." And so, having virtually no mind of my own, I went with him.

This was a revolutionary moment within philosophy. Now, philosophy has always been a very narrow field, so it wasn't as if this revolution got much coverage in the press. But internally, it was gigantic. An entire subject matter was being transformed. In the middle of a world in which truly profound and meaningful things were happening, philosophy was having its own little revolution.

It turns out that there was indeed something to study, the analytic philosophers said—even if ideas were not reasonable subjects for study because they were too slippery, they were too abstract, they had no grounding or, insofar as they were grounded, they were best studied by science and not by an abstract method. The thing that could be studied, that could yield some worthwhile results (as opposed to the metaphysical meaninglessness of traditional philosophy), said the analytic philosophers, was language.

The major shift toward language that has occurred over this century didn't just happen in philosophy, but in all areas of study. Arguably, though, it began—and obtained a substantial foothold—within philosophy itself. If we couldn't study ideas, we could at least study the language that we used in articulating these ideas; that was sufficiently palpable, sufficiently identifiable. We could develop methods for the study of the language that we use to talk about the good, the bad, the evil, the right, the wrong, the worthy, the known, the unknown, the mysterious, the real, etc. We could take a harder look at what it is that was happening when people were talking about ideas, even if the ideas themselves were not meaningful.

Because surely, people were talking about them. Even if it's the case that not a word that any philosopher since Plato had ever said was meaningful, analytical philosophy pointed out, it was still the case that people had said lots of words. People were engaging in certain kinds of discourse; it wasn't just philosophers who engaged in discourse. Ordinary people say things like, "This is a good thing"; "This is the right way to behave"; "This is a bad thing"; "This I know to be true"; "This is reality"; "This is not reality." They might not say it in the pompous way that philosophers do, but they do speak that language in appropriate, ordinary kinds of ways. They speak these conceptions—to use a conception that came out following Wittgenstein—in ordinary language. Indeed, a whole school of philosophy emerged, also out of Wittgenstein but associated with a British philosopher named J.L. Austin, called the ordinary language school of philosophy, which attended to what it is that ordinary people meant when they said things like, "This is the right thing to do." Simple things like that. Terms like "right" come up again and again. What do they mean? The ordinary language people, as a kind of a subdivision of analytic philosophy, would study what ordinary people meant, and philosophers, then, would study not only what ordinary people meant but what philosophers themselves meant in the use of this language.

So the study of language suddenly blossomed. It was like this unbelievable thing happened: Suddenly, overnight, almost everyone in philosophy was studying language. In my opinion, this study of language was inseparable from what is now identified by postmodernists as deconstruction. So, again, not to take pride in philosophers getting there first—I don't want to do a whole philosophical, chauvinist thing—but I do think that philosophers have been into the business of doing deconstruction long before some of the people in different fields, including psychology, have come on board. Philosophers have been looking at language, and attempting to figure out how language meant, what it meant, when it meant, if it meant, etc., for quite awhile.

So here I was in the midst of this kind of revolution. Part of what began to happen with this discovery of analytic philosophy—the study of language and the study of the language of philosophy—was that many people (and nearly everyone at Stanford) were taking a look at the entire history of philosophy and traditional philosophical thought from the vantage point of the new analytic approach. People were into discovering which of the traditional philosophical works were utterly and completely metaphysical, utterly and completely meaningless, and which you could somehow salvage something from by studying the language of their philosophical argumentation.

They started looking at some of the traditional philosophical figures, and some of what seemed to be the great ideas (particularly the great philosophical ideas of Western thought). One of those ideas, one of the real glorious, classical philosophical arguments that people started to look at was the argumentation of Descartes, the French philosopher of the l600s. Descartes, as probably many of you know, was something of a genius; he was a great mathematician, one of the discoverers of analytic geometry, and wrote in many other fields. He is well known even outside of philosophical circles for his argument, known by its full name in Latin: the*cogito ergo sum*. *Cogito ergo sum* is roughly translatable as "I think, therefore I am."

This was Descartes' effort to try to find a method to discover some indubitable building blocks for modern science. Back in the seventeenth century, the abandonment, at least philosophically, of the belief in faith and the religious method and the move to a more scientific method led to the attempt to discover if there were some truths which were so transparently certain that they are indubitable (could not be questioned).

Descartes was working to discover a method and a process by which he could identify indubitable truths—and what he came to was,*I think, therefore I am*. Part of what he was dealing with was the engagement of a popular skeptical argument of that moment in history, the argument from illusion: that it is possible to imagine that all kinds of things could be illusory. For example, I could be looking at Tom here, but maybe I'm suffering from a delusion or an illusion; maybe he's not there at all, maybe it's a complex trick with mirrors, maybe it's my bad eyesight. That is, illusion is forever possible. The argument from illusion had been around for a very long time in Western thought—at least since the Greeks and Heraclitus. But this notion of illusion became more significant as things became increasingly empirical. For illusion is not a problem for religious thought, for fairly obvious reasons—in a religious model, the most important objects are not to be seriously seen anyhow, so illusion is not problematic. But when you're starting to evolve a mode of thought in which empirics play more and more of a role, then the concept of illusion becomes more troublesome. Because then people can more and more question the certitude of what you're claiming, empirically or observationally, by saying, "Wait a second, how do you know that for sure? Maybe that's a misperception. Maybe that's not really what you're seeing."

There were, after all, the beginnings in this period of some discoveries which revealed that things weren't as they seemed. Copernicus is pointing out that the world is round, not flat, as it might have seemed to the naked eye. People are inventing new approaches with magnifying glasses and telescopes. People are starting to see all kinds of things that are different from what was apparent to the naked eye. So this notion of illusion is a very very powerful conception, which cries out for critical analysis in the 1600s and 1700s, the early moments of the Enlightenment and modem science.

So Descartes is saying, "Wait a second, illusion is always possible. In purely empirical terms, anything could be an illusion." He grants that point. "But," says Descartes, in developing the *cogito*, "Even if it's the case that what I'm thinking is illusory or delusory, even if what I'm thinking is all wrong, even if the object of my thought is completely mistaken, what can be established by the fact that I'm thinking something is that*there is a thinker*."

Let's try this out with perception for just a moment, to get the feel for it. I might be thinking that I'm perceiving Tom. I say, "I know Tom, I see him every week, he's someone I know very well, I'm sure that's Tom," and it might turn out that it's a mannequin of Tom. "Oh my god, I wasn't seeing Tom at all." But, I was at least seeing a mannequin of Tom, I was at least seeing what was the illusory phenomenon that I took to be Tom. So there was something that was certain in that, argues Descartes, namely, that there was someone who was doing the seeing or the thinking or the perceiving, even if there was complete delusion taking place.

Descartes goes through this intensive method and discovers this as a basic truth, *cogito/ I think, ergo sum/therefore I am*, which becomes one of the most famous philosophical arguments and one which contributed very substantially to the development of modern science. It becomes a foundational claim of what has come down to us as rationalism; that it is rational to realize that though we might be incorrect in all of our empirical perceptions, it's at least the case that we can count on the certitude that something is going on by someone when they're making what may perhaps be endless mistakes.*Cogito ergo sum. I think, therefore I am*. There is a thinker. Maybe the thinker is fooled consistently, but there is a thinker.

The engagement of this conception by analytic philosophy was fascinating to me. Thousands of things were written about this and I could't possibly summarize all of them; but I want to talk just a little bit about the general approach to this classical argument in the hands of the analytic philosophers. Here's what they said:

If you look at*I think, therefore I am* linguistically, it's a very strange and perhaps fundamentally specious argument. Why? Well, some of them said (I won't even cite names here, this is a combination of literally hundreds of people who wrote about this), *I think therefore I am* is no more valid as an argument form than is the argument, *I'm having a ham sandwich, therefore I am*. After all, from the vantage point of what language means, if you're having a ham sandwich, there must be someone who's having a ham sandwich. The argument of the form *I think therefore I am*is true not by virtue of some extraordinary feature of thinking but simply by the linguistic form of that kind of statement, and therefore you could substitute for "I think, therefore I am," "I'm having a ham sandwich, therefore I am," "I'm sitting in my room, therefore I am," "I'm smelling, therefore I am," "I'm foul, therefore I am," or whatever.

The analytic philosophers argued that a linguistic statement of that form entails that someone is doing something, because that's what the statement means. One could say, perhaps, that that linguistic form establishes something, but what it establishes is something about the nature of language, not about the nature of reality. Reality still remains outside, and Descartes' notion that he had established something about reality is mistaken. What he really came upon, unself-consciously, was a certain feature of so-called subject-predicate language.

Articles after article in journal after journal were written about this. And then many people started to develop reactions to that form of argument and the analytical critique of the *cogito* itself started to get critiqued. This critique (of the analytic philosophy argument) looked something like this.

So wait a second, perhaps it's true that *cogito ergo sum*, *I think, therefore I am* is linguistically similar to "I'm having a ham sandwich, therefore I am." But there is something quite special, these philosophers argued, about the language, if not the concept, of thinking. There's something conceptually interesting about thinking and the language of thinking, indeed, about mental language in general (including emotive language, perceptual language, cognitive language, attitudinal language), for example, "I'm having a thought"; "I have an idea"; "I have a conception"; "I have a feeling"; "I have pain." While it might not be the case that it is profoundly different in one way from "I'm having a ham sandwich, therefore I am," it is the case that if you look at mental language you will come to see that it does entail an "I." Even if the mental experience you're having is itself an illusion, it does require an "I" to be having the illusion. You think you see something, or think you know something, or think you understand something, or think you believe something—you could be wrong about all those things. A man could be having a nightmare and scream, "I believe that Antarctica is floating over my head!" and in a more sane moment when he wakes up he could say, "No, I guess Antarctica was not floating over my head, but I did, in that experience, believe that."

But that believing, so this counter-argument went, does require an "I." There must be an I because of the nature of how emotive or cognitive or mental language works. If mental language can be completely in error vis a vis the object, if you understand and study and look at it, it seems to at least entail that there is a subject which has a certain relationship to the object. And so while Descartes might have not been quite accurate (after all he was living, some of these analytic philosophers said, a very long time ago and he wasn't hip to language), it is the case that there does seem to be something special about mental language, and that special thing is that the I, or the self, has to exist for us to make any sense out of it at all. You see, if you throw out the self, if you reject the I, it becomes impossible to use mental language at all in a way that is comprehensible.

This is an argument that attracts many people. Indeed, my guess is that in some form or another, most people in this room (indeed, most people in the world) would find this argument terribly compelling. There's an ongoing history of this kind of argumentation, but for the moment I don't want to continue that history, because I want to make a shift to another history right now.

Wittgenstein was one of the founders of analytic philosophy. He himself wanted no schools, but many different schools emerged out of Wittgenstein's later work. He didn't set them up and he didn't particularly care for them, but they did emerge nevertheless. Wittgenstein addressed mental language, particularly in his later writings which were published only posthumously, and most particularly in a volume that has come to be known to us as*Philosophical Investigations*. Some of the most important things he wrote about mental language had to do with a very interesting conception—something called "private languages." He raised this very interesting question: "Is it possible that you could have a language that no one understood except the person who made it up? A language that was purely private. It wasn't a language to communicate with others, it was just a language by which, for lack of a better formulation, you communicated with yourself. Is it possible to have such a language?"

It was an esoteric topic, but it turns out to be not quite as esoteric as it might appear at first glance. What Wittgenstein was pointing to was that the commonsensical position is that there are private languages. Even if they don't use the language of private language, most people do tend to think that their purpose in speaking is to give expression to what it is that's going on in their heads. And though we might find public forms of communicating them (saying "I'm having this idea, I'm having this belief, I have this feeling, I have pain," etc.), we do endorse the concept of private languages because, says Wittgenstein, we fundamentally endorse the conception of thinking to ourselves. Most people would say, "Well of course I think to myself, I walk around, I think about things, I have ideas, I have beliefs, I have feelings, I have attitudes, I have intentions, I have desires. These things all go on long before I ever attempt to communicate them or share them. These things all go on in a place called my head, my mind, my will, somewhere or other."

Some people would even say something like, "As a matter of fact, I have pictures in my head. I think about something, and I actually see a picture, then I give expression to it by using certain language. I have feelings, perhaps they're not in my head, perhaps they're in my heart, perhaps they're in my stomach, perhaps they're in my soul, but there are things that go on inside of me. Perhaps I use the appropriate social terms for the purposes of communication; but I can make up new ones. I can make up a handful or a whole new set of terms. Instead of calling a certain intention to go to the park tomorrow going to the park tomorrow I could call it Someone eats banana peels on Thursday, and give that the name of that intention. So that when I refer to it myself, no one would know what I was talking about. Not only could you have a private language, in a certain way we all have the capacity for private language, and we all have the ability to create private language, and the only reason that we don't *just* engage in private language creation is that we wish to use language to communicate with others, and so there are societal conventions which accomplish that. But surely we have the capacity for private languages, we *think*things, we*fee*l things, we *believe* things, we*intend* things, we*have an inner life."*

Wittgenstein wants to explore whether we really do have an inner life. He wants to explore not just the language we use in talking about our so-called inner life, but the language of inner life itself. Is there a self? Is there a place where we think these thoughts, feel these feelings, have these beliefs? If so, where is it? How does it work? How does the language work? Is it useful to understand this whole phenomenon as us having thoughts, feelings, pains, intentions, beliefs, desires, the whole litany of mental life? Is it best to understand us as having them somewhere inside of us and then, in the process of communicating, giving "expression" to them? Is it the case that when I'm saying something to someone what I'm doing is expressing what I already have or know or understand or has somehow or another gone on inside my head? That something, at some level, in some way, has gone on in here, and now I'm somehow finding a way to communicate that by a process called expression? And that you could and will and do express yourself in return? Is "We express ourselves to each other" a sensible way of understanding—asks Wittgenstein—this whole phenomenon of communication? This whole phenomenon of language?

Are we expressors? And if we are expressors, doesn't it seem to follow that Descartes and the analytic philosophers of that tradition who said that there must be a self were right? Because if we are fundamentally people who express what is going on inside, then the self could be understood as that inside, if you will, or at least that something inside which gives expression to what it is that's inside. There has to be an active, internal agent, so the argument goes, to carry out this internal work. For lack of a better word one could call that self. So, says Wittgenstein, this picture that has been around for hundreds and hundreds of years of the human being as an expressor seems to fit hand in glove with the notion of a self.

Then Wittgenstein goes on to challenge that picture. He says that it's a faulty picture. He goes into endless detail and exquisite and fascinating analytic argumentation to show that this is a defective picture. In much the way that the picture of the earth as the center of the universe did at one point in history, this picture—of an inner life, an outer world and an expressionistic relationship between the two such that people give expression to what is happening in their inner lives dominates our way of talking, thinking and understanding. Other people hear that and are able to identify with it because, so the picture goes, they have an inner life which is not so dramatically different from yours, so they can relate to and identify with those words. Wittgenstein says—with endless analysis—why he thinks that picture is faulty.

What Wittgenstein doesn't do, at least so far as I can see, is to suggest an alternative picture. He makes a blistering critique of that expressionistic picture. But he doesn't offer, it seems to me, a positive conception or positive picture which is not—let me use a term here which is a traditional philosophical conception—*dualistic* in a particular way. By dualistic what we mean here is that there is an inner world and an outer world, divided from each other and bridgeable by a number of different things, but most particularly bridgeable by something called communication. And this dualistic picture suggests a very complex inner life for each of us which—typically through language—we give expression to, so that others know what it is that is going on for us. And by virtue of that, we can reach communities of agreement sometimes, we can communicate with our children sometimes, we can communicate with other countries and other cultures sometimes or, at the least, we do something which, everyone would agree, sometimes, is communication.

We think of ourselves as communicators. "Oh, I just had a talk with so-and-so. She said*this*. I said*this*. She said*that*." "Oh, you understood each other; it sounds like you understand each other." "Oh yeah, we communicate pretty good." What does that mean, "We communicate pretty good"? Well, according to the picture that Wittgenstein was critiquing, it means that I was able to find language which gave expression to what was going on for me in my head so that my friend over there could identify with it sufficiently to say, "Oh yeah, I got that. Let me tell you what's going on for me. Blah blah, …" and I said, "Oh, yeah, and. . . ." We did this process and we communicated with each other, and we can tell we communicated with each other because we wound up at the same restaurant. There's the pragmatic evidence that we communicated. If we hadn't communicated, she would have gone here and I would have gone there. Indeed we do, very frequently, wind up at the same restaurant. Some days are worse than others, and we don't, but most days we manage to get to the same restaurant. That is an argument for this kind of communication, and for this expressionistic model that Wittgenstein is critiquing, but as. I said, he never offers a positive picture, an alternative picture.

Which is what I was looking for. I had abandoned philosophy and, as some of you know, taken up the practice of therapy. There are hundreds of different schools of therapy and, within them, different therapists do different things. But still, it seemed to me that most therapeutic approaches bought in on this expressionistic dualism and, therefore, the conception of self. Most bought in on the notion that the therapeutic work, while it might be done in a zillion different ways, was to be understood in terms of getting to the bottom of what was going on for the other person or persons with whom you were working; that there was something "deeper" and that therapy could be profoundly useful if you could discover the deeper thing that was going on. With some of the more contemporary therapists, you could even help to reconstruct the concept of self. You could help people to understand better what it was that was going on underlying what they took to be going on. The therapeutic process, somehow or other, was designed to do just that--to get more deeply into the inside, to get more deeply into the self. Again, I don't want to stereotype that because there are endless techniques for doing and formulating that. But it seemed to me, at least, that people were buying into that overriding picture.

I was not the least bit comfortable with that picture. So when I started doing therapeutic work, some thirty years ago, I did so as an explicit effort to be of help to people with the usual things that they bring to a therapist's office, but to not invoke that conception of an inner self which I was going to help them get more deeply into and therefore deal with all the accoutrements that traditionally guide therapy (for example, the "resistance" that people have to getting to this "inner self"). I was not going to attend to those kinds of things, as best as I could avoid them. But it's very hard to avoid, in part because it's such a dominant picture and ordinary conception that clients bring it in, even if you don't happen to feel comfortable with it.

So I began to search for a method—to find a way of helping people which did not rely on what I took to be the foolish and unhelpful notion that there was this inner life, which was going to or trying to gain expression, and that my job as therapist was to help people get more deeply into their selves.

I've been working for thirty years now, and I think I've made some headway on this, although in the earliest years it was very hard. I didn't feel the least bit comfortable that I was succeeding. I would find myself constantly reverting to that language, getting self-seduced into talking about things in that way, and then wondering if I wasn't just fooling myself. "Maybe it's just a theoretical belief which really doesn't have applicability, because I find it hard, myself, to *not talk* that way. I don't know how to talk to a person because the underlying subtext of communication is something I'm challenging, but the other person isn't challenging it, so it becomes very hard to talk." The underlying subtext is part of what makes it possible for us to communicate, it seemed to me, and if this person is talking with*this* conception underlying what language is, and I'm doing another thing, well then, it's very hard to talk.

I did get somewhat better at it over the years. Then I discovered someone who actually gave me a conception that I felt very close to in terms of my therapeutic work, but that I had never seen formulated before. It was transformative for me to finally discover an alternative, positive new picture. The person who gave me this new picture was the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky was not a clinician; in fact you could make out a case that he was very traditional and conservative in the area of clinical psychology, as were most of the Soviets at the time, in my opinion. He was a developmentalist, an experimentalist, a cultural psychologist. But he was profoundly concerned with method. Vygotsky says that the study of method is not just something that one does in advance of engaging in psychological activity; it is the very core of psychological activity. The notion that there is a fixed method, and then what one does in doing psychology is simply to apply that method, as, for example, one does in the physical sciences or in the natural sciences, is a fundamental misunderstanding of human life. There must be a *dialectical methodology*, Vygotsky says, a new kind of methodology which is continuously being created off the psychological interactions.

People, as opposed to stars, have reactions to the process of being studied. Stars respond to all kinds of natural phenomena but, so far as we can tell, they don't respond—in our ordinary way of understanding 'respond' –to being studied. They stay relatively the same even as they're being studied. People are constantly responding to the very activity of their being studied. But it's not a *problem* that people respond to being studied, it's a*characteristic* that people have. It's not as if, "Oh, wouldn't we be better off if we could simply follow the advice of behaviorists, and pay no attention at all to being studied, and just continue to behave in this kind of way and that kind of way." Insofar as one reproduces that kind of situation in a laboratory, it is a profound source of error; because what it does is to fundamentally transform what human beings are like in the effort to study them, and if you change the subject matter of what you're studying, in order for it to be studied, that is, says Vygotsky, by definition a lousy study. It's not a study of how people actually are, it's a study of how you can get people to be, in order for them to get studied. So, Vygotsky says, psychology has to create a method which is sensitive to this fundamental feature of human beings—that we are responsive and continuously responsive to what is going on, and therefore continuously involved in the activity of changing what's going on.

Vygotsky introduces this rather extraordinary methodological distinction having to do with tools. One kind of tool is the tool for a result. It’s the kind of tool we understand very well. We use a hammer to produce a certain kind of result; we use a lathe to produce a certain kind of result; we use conceptual tools to bring about certain results. There are all kinds of instrumental tools like this in psychology, in the social sciences, in engineering, in life.

But, says Vygotsky, there is another kind of tool—not a tool for a result, but a tool and a result. That is, a tool which is sensitive to the fact that you cannot separate the tool itself from the result the tool is going to produce, because they are inextricably bound together. For Vygotsky, the psychological tool is best understood developmentally as a tool-and-result in which the process of using the tool to understand another person impacts profoundly on the other person which impacts profoundly on what the tool is. The tool is transformed in tool-and-result methodology; the tool is transformed by the process of the resulting phenomenon that comes from the study itself. In our efforts to understand, to help, to study, to advise, to teach, to therapize, etc., other human beings, we have to create a methodology which understands that extraordinary relationship. The method must not be simply the use of tools: which create the illusion that they can be abstracted from their use; it must be the creation of tools which are made in such as a way as to recognize that in using them they will bring about results which will transform them in the very process of using them. This is an extraordinary distinction. I was very moved by that. I remember when I first read Vygotsky I was literally blown away by it. But the best was yet to come.

Vygotsky actually comes up with a new picture to replace expressionism (the problem I'd been having for thirty years of never finding a useful alternative characterization). I'm reading Vygotsky and suddenly come upon words to this effect: "*The relationship between thinking and speaking is not the relationship of one being the expression of the other*." I stopped. He's talking explicitly to this issue, what is he going to say? Am I finally going to find this new picture? “When you speak,” says Vygotsky--and you can extend this to writing, but here he’s talking about speaking—“when you speak, you are not expressing what it was that you were thinking, you’re completing it.” I sat there—I don’t want to be over-dramatic about this—but I literally was stunned. “You’re completing it.” The speaking is not in a separate world from the thinking. There is no separate world. The speaking is a completion, the completion of what is traditionally identified as this inner process. Speaking/thinking is one complex dialectical unity. They're not two separate kinds of things which must be somehow joined societally. It's one thing. It's not as if in the movement of my arm, for example, the part when I'm doing this is one kind of thing, and the part when I'm doing that is another kind of thing. What we have is a process by which the movement goes from here to there. Such is the relationship between inner life and outer life, between thinking and speaking. There are not two separate worlds, with what we call expression connecting them. There's only one thing. It goes through complex transformations, and goes interactively back and forth.

Suddenly I had a clearer understanding of some therapeutic things that I wanted desperately to do and began to do. Because one of the immediate implications that I drew from this extraordinary new picture was that if speaking is the completing of thinking, if what we have here is a *building* process, which has different looks and different dimensions and different forms at different moments, but is all part of a continuous process of building, then this undermines the notion that the only allowable "completer" is the same person who's doing the thinking. For, if the process is completive, then it seemed to me what we're looking at is language--and this goes back to Wittgenstein--not simply as a way of giving expression to what it is that's going on for us "in our heads" but language as an activity of building. That is, what is happening when speaking or writing, when we are participating in a dialogue, discussion or conversation is that we are not simply saying what is going on but are *creating* what is going on. We are not looking simply to passively discover what is inside, we are looking to create what neither is inside nor outside but what is socially available to be created. We are builders; we are creators, we become poets! And we understand each other—on this picture, as I understand it now—by virture of engaging in that shared creative activity. And even though the traditional picture of language suggests that human beings are utterly and completely isolated, attempting to somehow or another get together by giving pictures of our inner selves, in my opinion, we are indeed not isolated in that way.

Some ten or so years ago, I began, more self-consciously than I ever had before, to work with people therapeutically to do what I call--and this is, again, my own strange philosophical orientation--pulling the referential rug out of dialogue. Could we find a way of talking and communicating with each other that is our building something by our very use of language in our talking and communicating? Could we do that, as opposed to becoming endlessly caught up in the notion of referentiality: "Is what you're saying true? Are you right? Am I right?" Could we somehow pull that referential rug out and find a way of using language poetically and creatively?

And so we started what was a very hard therapeutic process, not just for my clients but for me as well, to see what it would mean to try to get rid of truth, to try to get rid of reference, to try to get rid of self, and to work in ways that dialogue or discourse itself was creative. I started looking for ways to do that, and started learning from people I was working with who were profoundly helpful in teaching me what it would mean to create that. People who, for example, would undertake to complete what other people were saying--not to tell them what they took them to mean, or what they thought they really meant, or what the deeper meaning was, or what they identified with (so as to change the topic to be talking about themselves). No, not to do any of that, but to take whatever was said as part of an ongoing, collective, creative process, so that what wound up being the case at the end of a therapy group is that we had created something together. I found myself searching for a term for what we had created together. I didn't know where to look and I kept searching.

And then it hit me over the head. I had, almost independent of this process, started to work in theatre sometime during the 1980s. I was doing theatre over here in this part of our loft, and doing this thing called social therapy in the other part. At some point it got through to me that there was a profound connection between the theatre and the therapy I was doing. I was able to discover what it was that we were creating in therapy by this process, flawed as it was, troublesome as it was, difficult as it was. What we were creating in therapy, having pulled out the referential rug, was *performance*. People were creating a play. They were creating a performance. And that performance was of wonderful, developmental, therapeutic value. People were learning how to perform--going back to Vygotsky's language--people were learning how to perform *beyond themselves*. They were breaking out of the habit of simply being themselves to discovering not who they were but who they were not. It kind of hit me like a lightning bolt that that's how we learn as children. Vygotsky showed us that if children simply learned who they were on the basis of being who they were, they would never go anywhere, they would simply stay fixed. In the process of creative imitation that children go through, they are related to as performers in the language speaking community before they have the foggiest idea how to speak.

This performatory ability to continuously create with language doesn't limit us to that underlying deeper person, or to truth, or to giving expression to who we really are, but is a continuous process of creating who we are. As I've come to understand it, this is what human development is about. And it's what it is, for me, to help people develop. I'm convinced that therapy is of minimal value, unless it is developmental. I agree that there is some value in people simply sharing their pain and I think therapy therefore is worthwhile if it does nothing more than that. But if therapy is to be truly useful, in my opinion, it must be developmental. I think there is some kind of development that takes place in the process of ensemble, collective performance, not just of someone else's play, but *performance of our own discourse with each other*. Our very human interaction--our talking to each other, our touching each other, our feeling with each other, our loving each other, our teaching each other, our being with each other in all the myriad number of ways in which we do that--is fundamentally a creative process. It's not simply a process which is rooted in our giving expression to who we are as if that was some sort of fixed phenomenon.

So when I speak of therapy as engaging and deconstructing the illusion of self, this is what I'm talking about. It's this notion of self as a fixed inner necessity to be able to be the *cogito* of the*cogito ergo sum*, an inner necessity in any of the ways that we've been talking about it today. There is, in my opinion, no inner necessity for self, nor is there an outer necessity., This is not in any way to deny individuality. I firmly believe in individuality. But if individuality, as a conception, is designed to keep us permanently separated from each other, I find that not only morally troublesome, I find it fundamentally mistaken. Because we are not, in my opinion, separated from each other. We begin as social, we live as social, we end as social. This doesn't minimize my or your individuality. The marvelous feature of the creativity of being who we're not, in my experience, is that in being who we're not, we actually come to be more of who we are and show what is most unique about us. I think nothing is less unique than "giving expression" to the so-called inner or deepest self. The process of looking for our deepest self is a nondevelopmental process and a painfully frustrating one. Agreeing with Wittgenstein and many others, I think it's a search that is never realized, because--to put it straightforwardly--there ain't nothing there. Though there ain't nothing there, what there is is our capacity to continuously create something.

So, if you want to do a balance sheet of what you gain and what you lose from all this, you lose the self, and you gain the capacity to continuously create, collectively and in ensemble. I think you gain a deeper and deeper sense of collective human development and creativity. Some people, including people who are in therapy with me or study with me, frequently complain to me about this loss of self. "Don't you understand, it's a terrible thing! The self is the most important thing I have! I can't give up my self, I spent years trying to find myself! How can you ask this of me? I'm going to report you to the APA."

Well, I'm not concerned to help people to discover self. I'm concerned to help people discover life. When people come to me for therapeutic help with problems, with terrible pain, I'm not interested in getting more deeply into who they are so as to identify the roots of their problem or their pain and therefore to somehow ameliorate it. My concern is to help them to live. Now, that raises an interesting question which I've been asked frequently: "Well, Fred, in your approach do you ever create an entirely new self?" And my response is that I'm interested in your getting rid of the old self, not creating a new one. I'm not interested in creating any identity, or any self. I'm interested in helping people to grow developmentally through a process of better understanding--in a practical and activistic sense—their capacity to create. If we help people to create in the way in which I'm discussing, we have, at least in my experience, our best chance of helping people deal with the terrible pain that they frequently bring into therapy. That is what I mean by that funny title, *A Therapeutic Deconstruction of the Illusion of Self*.