DISTRIBUTED

AGENCY

N. J. ENFIELD AND PAUL KOCKELMAN

Distributed Agency

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   and

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CONTENTS

SERIES EDITOR PREFACE

The human capacity for distributed agency allows us to dissociate social units from the borders of the individual. Our social units—the "agents" who operate in people's worlds—can morph and shift in shape and size and constitution. From fleeting moments of cooperation to historical movements of community, people extend beyond the bounds of individuals. The case studies presented in this volume provide a wide-ranging set of entry points into this captivating area of study. Together they show that when we look at distributed agency we are looking at the cognitive and cultural dynamics of human sociality.

N. J. E.

Sydney, September 2016

EDITORS' PREFACE

We never really act alone. Our agency is enhanced when we cooperate with others, and when we accept their help. We benefit when we take credit for people's achievements, or when we free-ride on their ideas and their strengths. And not only is our agency shared through action in these ways, but we often have agency without having to engage in action at all. Even when at rest, we are bound up in networks of cause and effect, intention and accountability. The distribution of agency, for better or worse, is everywhere, and our species has perfected its arts.

This book presents an interdisciplinary inroad into the latest thinking about the distributed nature of agency: what it's like, what are its conditions of possibility, and what are its consequences. The book's 26 chapters are written by a wide range of scholars, from anthropology, biology, cognitive science, linguistics, philosophy, psychology, geography, law, economics, and sociology. While each chapter takes up different materials using different methods, they all chart relations between the key elements of agency: intentionality, causality, flexibility, and accountability. Each chapter seeks to explain how and why such relations are distributed—not just across individuals, but also across bodies and minds, people and things, spaces and times. To do this, the authors work through empirical studies of particular cases, while also offering reviews and syntheses of key ideas from the authors' respective research traditions.

IDEAS AND QUESTIONS GUIDING THIS BOOK

All creatures have some form of agency, but agency in humans is arguably unique. Humans have a special capacity to share agency through joint commitment and cooperation toward common goals, as well as through coercive and parasitic practices by which we co-opt the capacities, and take credit for the consequences, of others. We are the most flexible and creative

actors of all species, as shown by our formidable and complex technologies, from levers, swords, and printing presses, to bridges, drones, and the internet. Culture is itself the exemplar of relatively unconscious collective creativity. (Or at least many human agents like to think!)

We can think of agency as having two key components. First, there is *flexibility*. This is about who (or what) has a hand or say in the creation of some effect, object, idea, or action: from theorems and inventions to floods and revolutions, from commodities and crimes to conversations and crises. In most cases, many "hands" contribute, at different degrees of remove, with more or less effort and effect, and with greater or lesser visibility. These hands are social as much as material; cognitive as much as somatic; individual as much as collective; natural as much as artificial; flexibly creative as much as rigidly causal. Indeed, as soon as one starts tracking such connections, the distinctions often break down. It is hard to see where cognition ends and embodiment begins; where the divide between nature and artifice is to be drawn; where to cut off an individual from a collectivity.

The second component of agency is *accountability*. We must ask how those with agency are held accountable (usually by other kinds of agents) for their contribution. Who realizes the cost of a product, or garners the right to use it? Who is blamed for the failure of an action? Who is praised for the genesis of an idea? Who or what benefits from a new adaptation? Who berates themselves over an imagined sin? Through what mechanisms? Accountability is identified in different ways, using judgments with varying degrees of justness, rationality, and depth of vision. Accountability is both moral and economic, causal and normative, grounded in natural selection and cultural evaluation.

Current understandings of human agency suggest that our flexibility and accountability are often not located in the individual alone, but are radically *distributed*. This suggests a number of questions, which guided the discussions that have shaped the contributions to the book.[1] Among these are the following:

- Why and how do we excerpt agents at certain scales, and how do different understandings of agency alter such scales?
- When we cooperate with others, when is our agency weakened, and when is it enhanced?
- In what ways is material culture an extension of the person?
- While artifacts and technologies increase our flexibility in obvious ways, how do they affect our accountability?
- What are the causal forces that determine the scope and constraints of our agency? How are these forces related to norms?

- Why is it often considered appropriate to punish or reward a person for something that someone else did?
- How is it that multiple individuals can behave as one?
- What is the role of distributed agency in human evolution, and in ontogeny?

In short, who or what contributes to some action, idea, object, or outcome? And who or what is held accountable? In what ways, and to what degrees? With what conditions, and with what consequences? These are the questions we ask in this book.

CONTENTS

The ten parts of the book each group together essays that overlap in regard to their empirical topics and analytic commitments. Part One, "Agency as Flexible and Accountable Causality," introduces key themes through four interrelated chapters. In the first two chapters, Enfield theorizes some elements of agency, broadly understood as flexible and accountable causality; and then describes how agency, thus framed, is distributed across actors and activities. In the second two chapters, Kockelman reviews and synthesizes some classic texts that lead to such an understanding of agency; and then describes a variety of other possible ways of framing it.

The next nine parts take up interrelated questions from a variety of stances, partly deriving from the cross-disciplinary commitments of authors, and partly from the empirical contents they analyze and the theoretical questions they answer.

In Part Two, "The Agency of Institutions and Infrastructure," Bernstein takes up agency in actual state agencies—in particular, legal and political institutions that promulgate laws and regulations shaping the actions of citizens—and Elyachar takes up agency in the context of political revolutions, when critical energies are used to create, use, and destroy key forms of infrastructure.

Part Three presents perspectives on "Language and Agency." While much previous work on language and agency has focused on the representational and meta-representational capacities of humans, these four chapters take us into the trenches of interaction: talk-in-interaction as it unfolds in real-time practices, in face-to-face encounters. Dingemanse uses the science fiction fantasy of brain-to-brain interfaces to shed light on the natural distribution of agency in human communication; Floyd focuses on requests as a key means for instigating and negotiating the sharing of

agency; also on this theme, Rossi and Zinken focus in more closely on the fine-grained grammatical categories that languages provide as tools for mobilizing other people; and Sidnell focuses on a particularly important but overlooked element of the shared construction of action in interaction, namely the accountability that comes with our impositions on others.

In Part Four, "Economy and Agency," Guyer examines the ethics of debt as a way of distributing agency both across people and through time, and Maurer looks at the infrastructures of monetary accounting, where the act of "recording" an exchange can in fact be seen as effecting the very exchange itself. In Part Five, "Distributing Agency within Selves and Species," Parry explores the distribution of agency in moving the human body in professional therapy sessions, and d'Ettorre—on a very different scale—shows how agency is distributed across masses of individual bodies in the case of eusocial organisms such as ants.

In Part Six, "Social Bonding Through Embodied Agency," the theme of agency in human groups is further developed, with an overview by Cohen of some elements of social bonding through group exercise in humans, and a focus by Tarr on the same in dance and music. And in Part Seven, "Agency and Infancy," Rączaszek-Leonardi highlights the importance of different timescales in an exploration of the understanding of agency between infants and caregivers, and Tunçgenç stresses the importance of close temporal coordination in the bodily movements of infants and caregivers as a crucial step on the path from individual to collective agency in the lifespan.

Part Eight, "The Agency of Materiality," presents three studies of how agency gets into, and out of, inanimate objects: Crossland discusses the agency of human remains, as understood through forensic anthropology; Smith considers the agentive role of marbles in the lives of children; and Wilf explores how computerized algorithms can be a source of contingencies that are harvested to cultivate artistic creativity. In Part Nine, "The Place of Agency," Adams takes up agency through the eyes of a geographer focused on spatially distributed selves, and Lahlou looks at it through the lens of installations—or spatially arranged ensembles of affordances that shape the activities of those who act and think inside them. And in Part Ten, "From Cooperation to Deception and Disruption," Schweikard outlines the central importance of intentionality and normativity in the cooperative framework of joint action, while Umbres turns our attention to deception—a decidedly antisocial form of distributed agency—and Zuckerman delves further into the dark side of agency, with a study of attempts to sabotage others' courses of action, and the post hoc framings and attributions of agency that then emerge.

ENVOI

Human agency concerns the fundamental conditions and constraints under which we pursue our goals, from the simplest everyday actions to the greatest uses and abuses of power in society. But a deep understanding of human agency is elusive because the concept of agency has been understood and examined in such different ways. The meaning of the term *agency* is often radically simplified, reduced to or conflated with that of other terms: compare *free will, choice, language, power, generativity, imagination, self-consciousness*. There have been important advances in separate disciplines, but there has been little opportunity to combine and build on the collective achievements of research on human agency carried out using sometimes radically different approaches. Our goals with this collection of essays are to assemble insights from new research on the anatomy of human agency, to address divergent framings of the issues from different disciplines, and to suggest directions for new debates and lines of research. We hope that it will be a resource for researchers working on allied topics, and for students learning about the elements of human-specific modes of shared action, from causality, intentionality, and personhood to ethics, punishment, and accountability.

NOTE

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PART ONE

Agency as Flexible and Accountable Causality

CHAPTER 1

Elements of Agency

N. J. ENFIELD

On October 15, 1965, on Whitehall Street in Lower Manhattan, David J. Miller burned his draft card in protest at the Vietnam War (Miller 2001):

> The expectant crowd fell hush in front of me. The hecklers across the street ceased their ranting and watched silently. An eerie stillness settled upon our canyon as the last rays of the fall sun clung to the tops of the buildings. I said the first thing that came to my mind. "I am not going to give my prepared speech. I am going to let this action speak for itself. I know that you people across the street really know what is happening in Vietnam. I am opposed to the draft and the war in Vietnam."
>
> I pulled my draft classification card from my suit coat pocket along with a book of matches brought especially for the occasion since I did not smoke. I lit a match, then another. They blew out in the late afternoon breeze. As I struggled with the matches, a young man with a May 2nd Movement button on his jacket held up a cigarette lighter. It worked just fine.
>
> The draft card burned as I raised it aloft between the thumb and index finger of my left hand. A roar of approval from the rally crowd greeted the enflamed card. This awakened the momentarily mesmerized hecklers and they resumed their shouts.
>
> As the card burned, I discovered that I had made no preparation for the card to be completely consumed. I dropped the card as the flame reached my finger-tips. At my trial in federal court, the unburnt corner of my draft card, with a

bit of my signature, was introduced into evidence. The FBI had been Johnny-on-the-spot in retrieving the charred remains of my card so as to assist in their prosecution even though I never denied that I burned my card. Future card burners used tongs or cans in order to complete the job.

   ... Three days later the FBI swooped in on me in Manchester, New Hampshire.... I made bail the next day. I remained free till June 1968 when the draft-card burning case finally lost in the U.S. Supreme Court. I served 22 months in federal prison in Pennsylvania from 1968 to 1970.

Miller's story of publicly burning his draft card as a means of protesting against the US government's program of conscription during the Vietnam War illustrates the core elements of agency: he had a degree of flexibility in carrying out the behavior, and a degree of accountability. What does this mean? Let us start with the elements of flexibility:[1]

(1) Agents have *flexibility* over meaningful behavior, insofar as:
   (a) to some degree they *control* or determine that the behavior is done at a certain place and time (thus, to some degree Miller determined that his draft card would be burned at that place and time; though with minor delays due to his malfunctioning matches);
   (b) to some degree they *compose* or design the behavior as a means for a particular end; a thing to be done and a way to do it (thus, Miller at some level had the plan to destroy this draft card as a protest against the war, and he determined sub-plans as means to that greater end);
   (c) to some degree they *subprehend*[2] or anticipate how others could view and react to the behavior; for instance to some extent they may be prepared for certain interpretants—in other words, rational responses—by others; they may be surprised or disposed to sanction non-anticipated interpretants (thus, Miller was not surprised when hecklers tried to disrupt him, when FBI agents took his burned card as evidence, or when they arrested him in the following days; nor when he was praised as a hero by members of the antiwar movement).

These elements of flexibility are understood in terms of the semiotic process that underlies an agent's behavior (Kockelman 2007, 2013). Thus, controlling (1a) is about the production of perceptible behavior—potential signs—without respect to what that perceptible behavior may be taken to mean, or

to what interpretants it might so elicit. In Miller's case, controlling simply had to do with instigating an event of fire destroying a piece of paper.

Composing (1b) is about the relation between an agent and an overall semiotic process that this agent instigates. Composing in this sense concerns the degree to which an agent selects that behavior for a function, as a means to an end, and the degree to which her carrying out of the behavior is responsible for success in achieving her goal. Miller's goal was to protest against the war; as an agent, he played a role in determining which behavior would be produced and what that behavior may stand for. His selection of tools (draft card, fire) as means toward a local end (destroying the physical manifestation of a government order) determined the conditions for success in his venture: without the card actually catching fire and burning up, the planned action would not have been consummated. As Miller describes, there were minor obstacles to the execution of the card-burning behavior, related to the affordances of fire and paper: for one thing, the wind blew out his matches on his first attempts, and for another, the heat of the burning paper caused him to let go of the card and in the end not succeed in fully destroying it. For the behavior to succeed as Miller composed it, the effective destruction of a specific piece of paper was necessary to the consummation of a specific political act.

Within composing, we can distinguish between execution and planning. Differences in the manner of execution of a sign, which may be functions of the skill or conditions of an agent, will have consequences for how effectively a sign will succeed in standing for a particular object. While execution is the degree to which one's physical production of the relevant sign is done in such a way as to determine that the sign should be taken to stand for a certain object, planning is deciding which sign-object relations are to be created in the first place. Miller planned to put fire to paper, but his execution was lacking. In the end his plan was carried out, executed with the help of a bystander with a lighter.

Subprehending (1c) is about the relation between the agent and the overall semiotic process. Subprehension concerns the degree to which an individual effectively foresees the interpretants—in other words, the reactions and responses—that the sign event may evince. One way to measure this would be in the ways a person might reveal that they have prepared for a certain interpretant and not others. For example, if I ask *What's his address?* while at the same time pulling out a pen and paper to write the address down, by pulling out the pen and paper I am showing evidence of having subprehended that your interpretant (your answer) of my sign

(my question) will be to tell me the person's address, which I will then be already prepared to write down. Another way to measure subprehension in this sense is to monitor the accountability involved. Is a person surprised by or disposed to sanction certain interpretants? If I ask *What's his address?* and you look at me and say nothing, I might repeat the question or say *Hey I asked you something*. An agent subprehends interpretants of a sign event to some degree (especially the potential accountability): being prepared for some interpretants and not others; being surprised by, or disposed to sanction, some interpretants and not others. As noted above, Miller was surely not surprised by the heckling, the arrest, the conviction; nor was he presumably surprised by the praise, support, and imitation from other activists. This indicates that his degree of agency on the measure of subprehension was high.

With an agent's flexibility comes accountability, as Miller anticipated or at least subprehended:

(2) Agents have *accountability* for meaningful behavior, insofar as:
   (a) they may be subject to public *evaluation* by others for their behavior, where this evaluation—in the form of interpretants like praise, blame, or demand for reasons—may focus on any of the distinct components of flexibility given in (1), above (thus, Miller's actions were evaluated by many people from onlookers at the scene to federal judges in the US Supreme Court);
   (b) they may be regarded as having some degree of *entitlement* to carry out the behavior, and give reasons for it, and they or others may invoke this entitlement; this may relate to any of the distinct components of flexibility given in (1), above (thus, Miller's behavior was precisely designed to give him an opportunity to state his reasons for action, with the intention to publicize those reasons for action);
   (c) they may be regarded by others as having some degree of *obligation* to carry out the behavior, and give reasons for it, and they or others may invoke this obligation; this may relate to any of the distinct components of flexibility laid out in (1), above (thus, Miller's behavior could be used as a basis for motivating others, possibly through a sense of moral obligation, to do the same).

Another way of framing accountability in relation to behavior in the sense just defined is *ownership* of the behavior. Thinking in terms of accountability foregrounds the possibility of blame or praise, while ownership foregrounds rights and obligations.

So, in sum, agency is the relation between a person and a course of action and its effects. To summarize it in the leanest terms possible:

(3) With regard to some goal-directed controlled behavior, agency consists of the following:
   (A) Flexibility
      1. Controlling (determining that a perceptible/physical behavior occurs)
      2. Composing (selecting the behavior, its function, and execution)
      3. Subprehending (effectively anticipating interpretants of the behavior)
   (B) Accountability
      1. Being evaluated (by others, on any of [A1–3])
      2. Being entitled (a right to do the behavior can be recognized and invoked)
      3. Being obligated (a duty to do the behavior can be recognized and invoked)

There is a special relation between flexibility and accountability. Flexibility is regimented both by natural laws and by social norms, and often by these two in combination. One's accountability is lower when one's behavior is more heavily constrained by natural laws, because less choice is involved. Supporters of Miller are unlikely to sanction him for having delayed the burning of the card before he was given the cigarette lighter; they would recognize that his flexibility was at that moment thwarted by natural causes, and not by, say, some form of hesitation in anticipation of likely sanctions.

And so we arrive at Kockelman's definitive equation: Agency equals flexibility plus accountability. How flexible you are depends on how freely you can determine the elements of a course of behavior and its outcomes, in multiple senses: the physical carrying out of the behavior, the planning and design of the behavior, the placing of the behavior in an appropriate context, the anticipation or subprehension of likely effects of the behavior—including, especially, the reactions of others—in that context. How accountable you are depends on how much it can be expected or demanded that other people will interpret what you do in certain ways, for example, by responding, asking for reasons, sanctioning, praising, or blaming you. With these elements distinguished, we begin to understand why the concept of agency is far from simple or primitive, and why it has resisted easy definition. With the elements of agency distinguished, we may begin to understand the many subtleties of the agency problem, something that is especially needed when we want to take the next step and ask how agency is distributed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

1. This analysis of flexibility in agency is due to Kockelman (2007, 2013), though I take one liberty with the terminology (Enfield 2013:104–117). Kockelman's term for (1c) is "commitment," defined as "the degree to which one may anticipate an interpretant, where this anticipation is evinced in being surprised by and/or disposed to sanction unanticipated interpretants" (Kockelman 2007:380). I propose "subprehension," to avoid confusion with other dominant meanings of the word "commitment" (for example, in Kockelman 2007:153 and passim, "commitment" has a technical meaning in the domain of accountability, referring to "deontic obligation," something one is obliged to do). On agency and language specifically, see Ahearn (2010), Duranti (2004).

2. *Subprehend* may be defined as follows. If you subprehend something, it is as if you anticipate or expect it, but not in any active or conscious way; rather, if you subprehend something, when it happens you cannot say later that you had not anticipated or expected it. Subprehension is thus close to the notion of habitus (Bourdieu 1977).

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CHAPTER 2

Distribution of Agency

N. J. ENFIELD

It is easy to think that "an agent" should coincide exactly with an individual. But this is seldom, if ever, the case. One reason agents do not equal individuals is that the elements of agency can be divided up and shared out among multiple people in relation to a single course of action. When I get you to pass the salt, it is me who plans the behavior but you who executes it. Or when I report what a candidate said in yesterday's speech, it is me who speaks the words but the candidate who is accountable for what was expressed. With distributed agency, multiple people act as one, sharing or sharing out the elements of agency.

One person may provide the flexibility needed for meeting another person's ends—as in slavery, factories, and armies—or for meeting shared ends—as in team sports, co-authorship, and joint enterprise. Similarly, one person may bear the accountability entailed by another person's flexibility. It is hardly rare for a person to inherit the blame for someone else's punishable actions. Howitt (1904), writing on Aboriginal Australia, "mentions the case of an accused man pointing to his elder brother to take the blame, because an elder brother stands for and should, ideally, protect a younger" (Berndt and Berndt 1964:299). In law of this kind, "people are categorized in units the members of which are interdependent . . . [and] relations both within and between those units may not be framed only, or predominantly, in kinship terms" (Berndt and Berndt 1964:303). This nonmodern approach has difficulty fitting into today's world. In 2009, there was a campaign in the Australian Aboriginal community at Lajamanu in

the Northern Territory to find a solution to persistent social problems arising from the incompatibility of indigenous and government law. Here was the problem. If people who committed crimes were jailed and thus separated from their community before they could face traditional punishment (known as payback) then this payback would be meted out on family members of the transgressors, often leading to continuing feuds. The campaign called for official recognition of traditional punishment, allowing that bail be granted to indigenous offenders so that they might face punishment (for example, being speared through the thigh) and thus resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the community before being taken to jail.

Distributed accountability of the kind that the Lajamanu campaign sought to avoid is the essence of *the feud*, a universal phenomenon. Take for example the *gjakmarrja*—or blood feuds—of rural Albania. Blood feuding was largely dormant during the communist period, but with the fall of communism in the early 1990s, old feuds were rekindled, and people found themselves being held accountable for things that were done before they were born, sometimes by people they had never met. Here is a case (Mustafa and Young 2008:99–100):

> A family living in a village outside *Bajram Curri* . . . came under a new threat, even though the man from their family who had committed a blood feud killing had himself died seventeen years ago. The perpetrator's death did not satisfy the indebted family who sent a warning that they expected "blood payment" in the form of the life of a male member of the remaining family. The family under threat consisted of a widow living with her two sons, their wives, and several children. The family had already adjusted to the threatening situation: the eldest son had gone into hiding elsewhere, and the younger remained indoors, unable to leave the house. Obviously this situation had a drastic effect on the earning capacity of the family.

Cases like this take us to the heart of distributed agency. One man commits a misdeed against another, and yet revenge is taken years later between the two men's grandchildren, neither of whom was involved in the original transgression. Here, someone is held to account for something that someone else chose to do. Here, agency, with its components of flexibility and accountability, is divided and shared out among multiple individuals while still being anchored in a single, sometimes decades-long course of action. Cases like this highlight one of the key reasons why agents do not equal individuals: the locus of agency is the social unit, and social units are not confined to individual bodies.

This is another, related reason agents do not equal individuals: social units are often compound persons. People are able to merge together to form single units of motivation, flexibility, and accountability. If you and I agree to make sauce, we commit to a common course of behavior, which means that we have joint reasons for action. We act as one. We may carry out different subcomponents of the job of preparation—you pour; I stir—but normally in the end we will agree to share the praise or blame for success or failure. So just as an individual may act as a distinct unit of social action and accountability, so may she be part of a larger unit, a unit that incorporates other people.

The fission or dividing of agency between people is familiar from examples like speechwriters and messengers: two individuals own two parts of the agency involved. Joint action is the inverse of this. Joint action is the fusion or unifying of individuals into single, compound units of agency. People can become socially fused in common action, especially with regard to their accountability. But to define joint action, it is not enough to say that two or more people do the action together. Because we are talking about agency, we must work in terms of agency's distinct elements. A comprehensive examination of joint action must distinguish joint agency at its logically distinct levels: joint controlling, joint composing, joint subprehending, joint evaluability, joint entitlement, joint obligation. Multiple individuals may together inhabit a single social unit with reference to any of these elements of agency.

Numerous species display fission-fusion social organization, "chang[ing] the size of their groups by means of the fission and fusion of subunits . . . according to both their activity and the availability and distribution of resources" (Aureli et al. 2008:627). These social dynamics arise naturally from the fact that we live in large and intensive social groups yet we are separate individuals. The fission-fusion dynamic in humans can be fast-paced. Through the course of any day we move in and out of membership of transient, often momentary pairs or groups. These changes may occur at fine time scales, such as when we switch in conversation from the status of speaker versus addressee and back again, or in a chess game when we alternatively have the status of being the one whose turn it is. Or the changes may occur at longer time scales, less frequent in the life span and typically with greater ceremony, such as when we change from single to married, or from lay to initiated. Fission-fusion dynamics in human social life must be understood not just in terms of group size and location but also in terms of the numerous if not innumerable relationship types that ultimately define a society. These relationships may be called statuses, as defined originally

by the anthropologist Ralph Linton: sets of rights and duties that hold with respect to certain others. Much of social life is about managing changes of status. The navigation of status often involves moving in and out of membership in composite units of agency. Changes of status, at all levels of grain, are closely associated with fission-fusion agency.

For joint action, there needs to be joint commitment (Clark 2006). In the philosopher John Searle's terms, joint commitment might be defined as a status function declaration of one's acceptance of some form of shared accountability (Searle 2010). Psychologist Herb Clark uses this notion to reanalyze the notorious experiments conducted by Stanley Milgram in New Haven in the 1960s (Milgram 1974). Volunteers in an experimental setting were instructed to administer electric shocks to another volunteer whenever he made an error in a memory task. They were surprisingly willing to inflict harm in this experiment, a fact that has been analyzed as having to do with obedience to authority. Clark reinterprets the finding, suggesting that joint commitment is what really accounts for why volunteers in these experiments ended up behaving in ways they would otherwise have abhorred. These volunteers were not merely doing what they were told. By agreeing to participate in the experiment in the first place, they had made a pact with the experimenter, and people are—evidently—deeply reluctant to withdraw from social pacts. Clark uses Milgram's extreme example of joint commitment for illustration, but his point is that these pacts are being made by all of us, all the time. They are a constant and essential part of social life and they are implicit in our every move. But when you jointly commit, what are you committing to? The answer is that you are agreeing to merge, on some level, with another individual in carrying out a single course of action. Clark's point is that you then become socially and morally accountable for reneging on that agreement. This is cognitively underpinned by what students of human sociality, from philosophy (e.g., John Searle, Raimo Tuomela) to biology (e.g., Michael Tomasello, Josep Call), refer to as shared intentionality (Tomasello et al. 2005).

Distributed cognition (Hutchins 2006) is a type of distributed agency in the sense meant here. Often, distributed cognition encompasses physical action and not just cognitive processes like reasoning. But since cognition is more generally a kind of goal-directed flexible behavior, then distributed cognition can also be analyzed in terms of the three elements of flexibility in agency: animating, authoring, and subprehending (and their interpreter corollaries: perceiving, ascribing, and interpreting). We should be able to improve our accounts of distributed cognition by exploring implications of the ideas that sometimes the distribution of cognition is in the realm of what we do with our bodies (controlling and executing);