Michael Chapman 1947–1991

M.	Michael	Chandler
J.	Jeremy	Carpendale

Vancouver

The sad news is that our colleague Michael Chapman has died of an extended illness. His untimely death (Michael was 44) occurred with a minimum of suffering and a maximum of dignity on December 11th 1991. Compounding this tragedy, Michael's wife, Victoria Waiters, has gone missing in her grief and is now feared dead as well. This double-loaded tragedy not only stole from us two persons that many of us held dear, but also represents an immeasurable loss to the whole discipline of developmental psychology, to which Michael devoted most of his professional lifetime.

Because the natural opportunities to gradually learn about such matters in more ordinary ways have been lost, a few details of Michael's life are offered here. Few are likely to know, for example, that, as a boy, Michael was adopted by the Hopi community in which his father worked and given what will now forever remain a secret Hopi name. That early title, bestowed in a community effort to protect him through a childhood illness, perhaps worked to sensitize Michael to the necessary role of culture in the formation of mental life, and to convince him that development is never simply about socially isolated individuals in interactions with impersonal objects.

Michael's formal training about such matters began at the University of California at Santa Cruz, while his country was at war in Vietnam. In those early troubled times, he wrote a first novel in which idealistic young soldiers hoped for a death quick enough to spare them the realization that their plans and projects would never be completed. Michael chose instead to come to Canada, where he briefly studied philosophy at York University and where his thinking came to be influenced by the work of Juan Pascual-Leone. In that setting he read and was deeply influenced by Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* – an interest that later led him to edit a book with Roger Dixon entitled *Meaning and the Growth of Understanding: Wittgenstein's Significance for Developmental Psychology*. It was also while in Toronto that Michael met Victoria Waiters, who later became his wife and companion on a series of European adventures – adventures that would play a part in their decision to work in Berlin a decade later.

Having gained in his travels a knowledge of French and German that would open up to him a scholarly community inaccessible to many of his North American colleagues, Michael returned to the USA, where he entered a graduate training program in developmental psychology at the University of

Virginia. His work there under the supervision of Richard Bell instilled in him a life-long fascination with Piaget's writings, and so prompted him to go on to a further period of post doctoral study with Hans Furth and James Youniss at the Catholic University of America. At the end of these studies, Michael took a post at the National Institute of Mental Health, where his work on children's emotions, carried out in collaboration with Marion Radke Yarrow and

Carolyn Zahn-Waxler, strengthened his commitment to situating the study of cognitive development in the affective and social contexts of which it is a natural part. Three years later, Michael went on to accept a position in Berlin as a research scientist at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development and Education. While there, he undertook a detailed study of Piaget's own intellectual history, which formed the basis of his important book *Constructive Evolution: Origins and Development of Piaget's Thought*. In 1987, Michael returned to Canada to take up a faculty position at the University of British Columbia. During the next 4 years he continued his active research interests in children's reasoning, and published with one of us an edited volume entitled *Criteria for Competence*. There he introduced a chain of ideas that were to occupy him until his death. In particular, he hoped to synthesize Piagetian operationalism and Wittgenstein's constructivist semantics to produce a new theory of children's reasoning that he called 'operational semantics'. This theory, which involves a marriage of ideas drawn from Vygotsky as well as Piaget, turned upon the notion of an 'epistemic triangle' that made a third and more explicit place for the social or interpersonal contributions that, in his view, always complement more conventional subject-object interactions. While this is not the place to attempt to draw out the several directions in which he had hoped to take these new ideas, perhaps even this much is enough to signal that the finished writings for which Michael is already so widely recognized and universally valued were only early moves in what was to be an ongoing scholarly undertaking that we will now never see through to the end. Still, opportunities remain. The most recent volume in the Jean Piaget Symposium Series was dedicated to Michael, and special symposia have been planned to honor his work at meetings of the American Psychological Association and the Jean Piaget Society. Clearly, his work will have an enduring influence on the science to which he devoted all his strength.

Those fortunate enough to have known Michael personally will not be surprised to learn that his constant search for whatever meanings lie hidden within the processes of change also extended into an examination of his own impending death. In an unfinished autobiography he commented about his own failing health as follows: 'Curiously, the fate that now confronts me appears to have a familiar visage, and I suddenly recognize it as a reflection of myself. My illness is not a meaningless accident that has merely occurred to me; it is the expression of who I am at some level deeper than I can fully understand.' Until his death, he struggled to understand these deeper levels in himself and others. He will be greatly missed.

Remembrances to Michael's family will be forwarded if sent to Michael Chandler, Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC Canada V6T1Z4.