As a theme for theoretical psychology, Doing Psychology under New Conditions implies a complex context and shifting background against which our conceptual, philosophical and critical work is briefly foregrounded. As the contributors to this edition of the conference proceedings show, new connections are forged between previously independent intellectual activities, political allegiances and solidarities shift and change, and previously unanticipated situations require new responses. The papers in the volume highlight changes to the environments in which psychology operates that are not merely re-iterations of previous theoretical topics.
Doing Psychology under New Conditions
Proceedings of the Biennial Conferences of the International Society for Theoretical Psychology

Previous Volumes


Doing Psychology under New Conditions

Edited by

Athanasios Marvakis, Johanna Motzkau, Desmond Painter,
Rose C. Ruto-Korir, Gavin Sullivan, Sofia Triliva, Martin Wieser

Peer-reviewed, Edited and Selected Proceedings of the Fourteenth Biennial Conference of the International Society for Theoretical Psychology
Thessalonica, Greece, June 2011.

Captus University Publications
# CONTENTS

## PREFACE

x

## KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

1. With philosophy and terror: Transforming bodies into labor power  
   Silvia Federici  
   2

2. An experiential ethnography of a text-reader conversation:  
   Discovering mental illness  
   Dorothy E. Smith  
   11

## CONSIDERING CURRENT AND ANTICIPATING FUTURE CONDITIONS

3. Ubuntu, Qi and feeling: An exploration of non-western views of mind  
   Hans van Rappard  
   22

4. Darwinian aesthetics: Criticizing the good-gene hypothesis of physical beauty  
   Nora Ruck  
   31

5. Postmodern shame: Self-effects and emergent productions  
   Steve Larocco  
   41

6. On the interaction between implicit and explicit strategies for behaviour  
   René van Hezewijk  
   50

7. Translating between different frames of reference: A model for the social sciences  
   Vasi van Deventer  
   60

8. Acts of will: Eastern and Western perspectives  
   Martin E. Morf  
   67

9. Doing psychology with connectionist nets: The challenging route from simulation to theory  
   Chris Janeke  
   77
10 Free will from an ethological perspective 87
Jannes Eshuis

11 Psychological inquiry and disciplinary psychology: Distinct problematics 96
Rachel Joffe Falmagne

12 The many faces of ‘relevance’: South African psychology in context 103
Wahbie Long

13 Polyvocalism, emancipation, and sociohistoricism: Possibilities for a critical educational psychology 112
Stephen Vassallo

14 Sciences of the living dead: Race, psychology, and epistemic pollution 122
Thomas Teo

15 Peripheralization and the history of psychology: An example from Turkey 131
Sertan Batur

16 Problematizing the positive psychology of radical political theory 139
Mihalis Mentinis

THEORIZING NEW SOCIETAL CONDITIONS

17 Deconstructing immigration in the UK: Discourses on sameness and otherness 150
Ilana Mountian

18 Capitalism and discontent in Mexico’s drug war 157
David Pavón-Cuéllar & Mario Orozco-Guzmán

19 Psychology in a society beyond liberalism and communitarianism 166
Gordana Jovanović

20 Identity as an insecure psychological space: Reflections from the shifting ethnopolitics in Kenya 177
Rose C. Ruto-Korir

21 Theorizing community in and through Third Way ‘alternative’ praxis: A critical psychological analysis 187
Giouli Tsirtoglou
22 Working with autism across contexts: Theoretical considerations on community and state/private sector employment 196
Electra Anagnostopoulou

23 Is the discourse on extremism an extremist discourse? 202
Andrea Kleeberg-Niepage

24 Feminism in Israel: A slow but noticeable change in women’s psychology 209
Dahlia Moore

25 The ethics of psychology in the age of the globalized therapeutic culture 219
Ole Jacob Madsen

26 Doing psychology amidst a ‘crisis’ in capitalism: The relevance of situationism and psychogeography for studying environments 228
Alexander J. Bridger

RECONSIDERING WORK CREATED IN PAST CONDITIONS

27 Dialogue between mediation and style 238
Cor Baerveldt

28 Re-actualizing Bergson’s concept of duration: The role of schematic memory in psychological life 246
Andrés Haye

29 Fechner and Spinoza’s monism: An old alternative to a still current problem 254
Ericka Marie Itokazu & Arthur Arruda Leal Ferreira

30 Dilthey’s dream: Psycho-philosophical reflection through the work of art 263
Melinda Pifold

31 Culture and mind in reconstruction: Bartlett’s analogy between individual and group processes 273
Brady Wagoner

32 Methodological reflections on Leontiev’s Activity Theory: Activity Theory and ‘The Logic of History’ 279
Giorgos Kakarinos
| 33 | Ancient Greek philosophical dialogue and contemporary psychology | 289 |
|     | Manolis Dafermos |
| 34 | (Theories are) More than words: Why images are significant to theoretical psychology | 299 |
|     | Martin Wieser & Thomas Slunecko |
| 35 | Not a theory, but more than a word: An enquiry into the neoliberal mind and psyche | 307 |
|     | Dieter Redlich |
| 36 | Personality traits: Fuzzy constructs reified then dissolved | 315 |
|     | Brad Piekkola |
| 37 | The resilient disassembled past: Memory, presence, metonymy, and time | 323 |
|     | Scott Greer |

THEORY-INFORMED WAYS OF WORKING IN NEW PRACTICAL CONDITIONS

| 38 | ‘Learning’—a powerful explanatory concept, or an empty promise of psychology? | 334 |
|     | Wolfgang Maiers |
| 39 | Learning and conduct of everyday life and dropout in the Danish VET system | 346 |
|     | Klaus Nielsen |
| 40 | Expanding the conduct of everyday life concept for psychological media research with children | 355 |
|     | Niklas Alexander Chimirri |
| 41 | Understanding children’s learning as connected to social life | 365 |
|     | Anja Hvidtfeldt Stanek |
| 42 | Toward a subject-scientific research of counselling | 374 |
|     | Teemu Suorsa, Antti Rantanen, Matleena Mäenpää & Hannu Soini |
| 43 | Children in shelters and issues of helplessness: Challenges to the psychoanalytical clinic with children living in shelters in Rio de Janeiro | 384 |
|     | Sonia Altoé, Magali Milene Silva & Miriam Debieux Rosa |
| 44 | Psy/legal interfaces in the field of youth in conflict with the law: Assessment and proposals for new forms of intervention | 392 |
|     | Maria Cristina G. Vicentin, Miriam Debieux Rosa & Gabriela Gramkow |
45 The collective elaboration of trauma 401
Miriam Debieux Rosa, Sandra Luzia de Souza Alencar & Sandra Leticia Berta

46 Identity projects for migrant families: Gendered transmission in a context of change 408
Rebecca Weber

47 A realist approach to investigating inequalities in old age 416
Mary Breheny & Christine Stephens

48 What's behind philosophy? Covert psychological connotations and philosophical insights to enrich psychotherapeutic applications 424
Emmanouel Kougioumzoglou, Ioanna Bitchava & Angel M. Paleologou

CONTRIBUTORS 437
PREFACE

As a theme for theoretical psychology, *Doing psychology under new conditions* implies a complex context and shifting background against which our conceptual, philosophical and critical work is briefly in the foreground. As the contributors to this edition of the conference proceedings show, new connections are forged between previously independent intellectual activities, political allegiances and solidarities shift and change, and previously unanticipated situations require new responses. New conditions were also demonstrated by two key issues in relation to the 2011 conference; the first being the climate on the streets which permeated the conference, as Greeks became resigned to or rebelled against the new conditions of austerity. The second was the post-conference discovery by an international attendee of the history of the city and part of the University site—known by many citizens of Thessaloniki—that although the University was founded in the 1920s it has subsequent expanded on ground previously occupied by the city’s Jewish cemetery. The Jewish cemetery had been destroyed by the Nazis and their local collaborators during the occupation in 1942. As we adapt creatively to new moral, political, technological and cultural situations, therefore, the past and its connections to place are forgotten at our peril.

The chapters in this iteration of the ISTP conference proceedings reflect conditions not previously encountered or considered:

*Considering current and anticipating future conditions* whether this is the history of the top-down imposition of western psychology in Turkey, postmodern shame, translations between frames of reference, the possibilities of critical educational psychology, humour and radical political theory, the problem of psychology’s relevance in South Africa, competing accounts of free will, and psychology’s role in advocating and organising radical social change.

*Theorizing new societal conditions* such as the relationship between capitalism and drugs, relations between discourse on extremism and extremist discourse, identity and ethnopolitics in Kenya, psychology in societies that are beyond liberalism and communitarianism, extremist discourse, and feminism in Israel.

*Reconsidering work created in past conditions* which includes reinterpretations of the ideas of such key figures as Dilthey, Leontiev, Fechner, Spinoza, Bartlett as well as topics such as personality traits, memory, neoliberal mind, and the importance of images to theoretical psychology.

*Theory-informed ways of working in new practical conditions* such as working with autism in new critically understood terms and conditions, conceiving learning difficulties at school in terms of children’s communities, understanding vocational training dropouts and identity projects for migrant families.

The papers in the volume therefore highlight changes to the environments in which psychology operates that are not merely re-iterations of previous theoretical topics. Our editorial team—which was somewhat larger than those for previous proceedings—included everyone in reviewing, selecting and editing the papers. This larger team was appropriate for the reason that we chose to include as many chapters as previous ISTP conference proceedings (with the exception of the smaller Nanjing proceedings). Naturally, this latest iteration of conference papers retains the diversity of its predecessors. As we move to embrace the further development of electronic publishing of the proceedings with the Santiago conference, we hope that this and the work of
previous ISTP conferences is even more accessible and that it continues to influence new lines of theorizing, discussion and debate.

Finally, it would be remiss of us not to acknowledge the work of the organising committee as well as the staff and students of the School of Primary Education, Aristotle University Thessaloniki in creating the conditions for an excellent conference.

The editorial team

_Athanasis Marvakis, Johanna Motzkau, Desmond Painter,
Rose Ruto-Korir, Gavin Sullivan, Sofia Triliva and Martin Wieser_
KEYNOTE ADDRESSES
Chapter 1

With philosophy and terror: Transforming bodies into labor power

Silvia Federici
Hofstra University, USA

SUMMARY

Elaborating on the theory of the body and the methodology I developed in Caliban and the Witch (2004), this paper revisits the most salient aspects of capitalism’s struggle to transform the human body into a work-machine and the practices by which rebel subjects have provoked and resisted this mechanization. Moving from the rise of Mechanical Philosophy and the attack on Magic in 17th century Europe to psychology’s contribution to the development of industrial discipline, I examine the techniques that capitalism has deployed to turn bodies into labor-power. My aim in this context is twofold. On one side, it is to reframe our understanding of the crisis bodies and subjectivities are experiencing in our time—from the massification of “depression” to the epidemic of eating disorders—as an effect of a growing estrangement from the capitalist discipline of work and associated sexual division of labor. On the other, it is to explore how the generalized refusal of capitalist work is affecting the disciplinary field, and our conception of the powers our bodies may possess once liberated from the capitalist spatial and temporal segmentation of our lives.

No matter how much it proclaims its pseudo tolerance the capitalist system in all its forms continues to subjugate all desires ... to the dictatorship of its totalitarian organization, founded on exploitation, property, profit, productivity... Tirelessly it continues its dirty work ... suppressing, torturing and dividing up our bodies in order to inscribe its laws on our flesh... (Felix Guattari, Soft Subversions, 1996)

Our ability to resist control, or our submission to it, has to be assessed at the level of our every move. (Gilles Deleuze, Negotiations, 1995)

INTRODUCTION: WHY THE BODY?

There are different reasons why I wish to speak of the body at this conference despite the vast literature that already exists on this subject. First there is the old truth that “in the beginning is the body,” with its desires, its powers, its manifold forms of resistance to exploitation. As it has often being recognized, there is no social change, no cultural or political innovation that is not expressed through the body, no economic practice that is not applied to it (Turner, 1992). Second, the body is at the center of some of the most crucial philosophical debates of our time (the relation between the physical and the mental, nature and society) and of a cultural revolution continuing, in some respects, the project inaugurated by the movements of the 60s and 70s, which brought the question of instinctual liberation to the forefront of political work.
But the main reason why we must speak of the body is that we are witnessing a new process of “primitive accumulation” aiming to impose on us more exploitative work regimes, and new forms of regulation and social regimentation, which we need to resist. The protests that today are taking place in the streets of Athens and Thessaloniki, and many here will undoubtedly join, are a response to this attempt, and my paper wants to be a contribution to it. For rethinking how, throughout its history, capitalism has transformed our bodies into work-machines, and the disciplines’ involvement in this process, helps us think beyond a society in which life is transformed into work-time and assess “at every move” (as Deleuze recommends) our ability to refuse being reduced to “fragments of human beings,” increasingly estranged from our potentialities and powers.

Rethinking how capital and the state have striven to transform our bodies into labor-power also serves to measure the crisis that the capitalist work-discipline is experiencing at present and to read, behind the social and individual pathologies, the resistances, the refusals, the search for new anthropological paradigms, something to which a reconstructed psychology cannot be indifferent, if it wishes to break with its history of complicity and collaboration with Power.

The framework of analysis I propose, in this context, differs from the standard Marxist methodology, but also from the accounts of the body and disciplinary regimes proposed by Poststructuralist and Postmodern Theory (Foucault, 1972, 1979). Unlike the standard Marxist descriptions of the “formation of the proletariat,” my analysis is not limited to changes in property relations and/or the organization of the labor process. As Marx recognized, labor-power does not have an independent existence; it “exists only as a capacity in the living individual,” in the living body. (Marx, 1976, p. 274) Thus, forcing people to accept the discipline of dependent labor cannot be accomplished only by “expropriating the producers from their means of subsistence” or through the compulsion exercised by means of the whip, the prison, the noose. From the earliest phase of its development to the present, to achieve this goal, capitalism has had to restructure the entire process of social reproduction, remolding our relation not only to work but to our sense of identity, to space and time, to our social and sexual life.

The production of laboring bodies and new “disciplinary regimes” cannot therefore be conceived purely or even primarily as an effect of “discursive practices” as postmodern theorists propose. “Discourse production” is not a self-generating, self-sustent activity. It is an integral part of economic and political planning, shaped by material policies and concerns issuing from governments, employers, the military, and the resistances these policies generate. Indeed, we could write a history of the disciplines—of their paradigm shifts and innovations—from the viewpoint of the struggles that have motivated their course.

Conceiving our bodies as primarily discursive also ignores that the human body has powers, needs, desires that have developed in the course of a long process of co-evolution with our natural environment and that are not easily suppressed. I refer to the need for the sun, the winds, the sky, the need for touching, smelling, sleeping, making love, being in the open air, instead of being surrounded by closed walls. Keeping children enclosed within four walls is still one of the main challenges that teachers encounter in many parts of the world. This accumulated structure of needs and desires, and for thousands of years has been the precondition of our social reproduction, has been a powerful limit to the exploitation of labor which is why, throughout its history, capitalism has struggled to domesticate our body, in this process making of it a signifier
for all that is material, corporeal, finite, and all that presents itself as a limit to the dictates of “reason.”

**THE BODY IN CAPITALISM:**
FROM THE MAGICAL BODY TO THE BODY MACHINE

In *Caliban and the Witch* (2004) I examine this “historic battle” that capitalism has waged against the body. I argue that it stemmed from a new political perspective positing work as the main source of accumulation and thus conceiving the body as *the condition of existence of labor-power* and, at the same time, as the main element of resistance to its expenditure. Hence the rise of “bio-politics,” intended, however, not as a generic “management of life,” but as production of labor power, a process that historically has required constant social and technological innovation and the destruction of any forms of life incompatible with the capitalist organization of work. Here I can only touch briefly on what this project has entailed. Suffice to say that capitalism has separated human beings from nature, from others, from themselves, lengthening the work-day beyond the limits imposed by “nature,” privatizing the reproduction of everyday life, and remolding the body on the image of the machine.

I have located in this context, as the meeting place of Philosophy and Terror, the 16th and 17th century attack on magic and witch-hunts and the contemporary rise of Mechanical Philosophy. For all contributed, although with different instruments and in different registers, to produce a new conceptual paradigm, envisioning a body deprived of any autonomous power, fixed in space and time, capable of uniform, regular, controllable forms of behavior.

Already, by the 16th century, a disciplinary machine was set in motion that would incessantly pursue the creation of an individual fit for abstract labor, but constantly in need of being retooled, in correspondence with changes in the organization of work, the changing forms of technology, and workers’ resistance to subjugation.

Focusing on this resistance we can see that, while in the 16th century the model inspiring the mechanization of the body was that of a machine needing to be moved from the outside, like the pump or the lever, by the 18th century, the mechanization of the body was already modeled on a more organic type of machine. With the rise of *vitalism* (Barnes & Shapin, 1979, p. 34) and the theory of instincts we have in fact the emergence of a conception of the corporeal allowing for a new type of discipline, less reliant on the whip and more on the working of inner dynamisms, possibly a sign of an increasing interiorization by the worker of the disciplinary requirements of the labor process, proceeding from the consolidation of wage labor.

But the leap the Enlightenment made in the arsenal of tools, which the transformation of bodies into labor-power required, was the secularization and scientific production of ideologies by which labor discipline and the elimination of the deviants could be justified. Replacing the use of witchcraft and devil worship, by the 18th century the study of “nature”—in the form of biology and physiology—was mustered to justify racial and gender based hierarchies, and the creation of different disciplinary regimes, in correspondence to the developing sexual and international division of labor. Much of the intellectual project of the Enlightenment rotates around this development, whether it invented race and sex (Schiebinger, 2004, Chapter 5; Bernasconi, 2011, pp. 11-36), or produced new monetary theories conceiving of money as a stimulus to work rather than a record of past wealth (Caffentzis, 2000). Indeed, we cannot
understand the culture and politics of the Enlightenment—its debates between monogenists and polygenists, its reconstruction of male/female physiology as incommensurably different (Laqueur, 1990, pp. 4-6), its craniochronological studies “scientifically demonstrating” the superiority of white male brains—unless we connect these phenomena to the naturalization of the different forms of exploitation, especially those falling outside the parameter of the wage relation.

It is tempting, in this context, to also attribute the emergence, visible in the 18th century throughout the philosophical and scientific field, of a more organic type of mechanism to this bifurcation in the workforce, and the formation of a white, male, proletariat, not yet self-controlled and yet, as Peter Linebaugh has shown in the London Hanged (Linebaugh, 1992, p. 438), increasingly accepting the discipline of wage work. It is tempting, in other words, to imagine that the development of the theory of magnetism in biology, the theory of instincts in philosophy and political economy (e.g., the instinct to trade), and the role of electricity and gravity in physics or natural philosophy—all presupposing a more mind-like, self-propelling model of the body—reflect the growing division of labor and, accordingly, a growing differentiation of the way in which bodies would be transformed into labor power. This is a hypothesis that needs to be further explored. What is certain is that with the Enlightenment we see a new step in the assimilation between the human and the machine, with the reconstruction of human biology providing the ground for new mechanical conceptions of human/nature.

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF BODIES INTO LABOR POWER IN THE INDUSTRIAL ERA

It was to be the task of psychology, however, in the last part of the 19th century, to perfect the construction of the “man-machine” displacing philosophy in this strategic role. Because of its concern with psycho-physical laws and belief in causal regularities, psychology became the hand-maiden of Taylorism, in charge of containing the damage done to the workers’ psyche by this system, and establishing appropriate connections between humans and machines. Psychology’s involvement in industrial life escalated after WWI, which made a mass of uniform, obedient experimental subjects available to it, providing a formidable laboratory for the study of “attitudes” and means of control (Brown, 1954; Rozzi, 1975, pp. 16-17). Originally concerned with the effects of muscular work on the body, soon called to confront resistances to work, absenteeism, and resistance to its own methods, psychology soon became the discipline most directly in charge of controlling the work-force (Rozzi, 1975, p. 19). More than doctors and sociologists, psychologists have intervened in the selection of workers, conducting thousands of interviews, administering thousands of tests, to choose “the best man for the job,” spot frustrations, decide promotions (Rozzi, 1975, p. 19).

Displacing pathologies inherent to the industrial organization of work into a pre-existing instinctual reality (needs, drives, attitudes) and giving a mantle of scientificty to policies only dictated by the quest for profit, psychologists, since the 1930s, have been present on the factory floor, at times as permanent employees, directly intervening in the labor-capital conflict. As Renato Rozzi has well pointed out, in Psicologi e Operai (1975), this intervention in the struggle has been crucial for the very development of psychology itself. For the need to control workers has forced psychologists to reckon with the workers’ “subjectivity,” and adjust their theories to the
effects of workers’ resistance. The struggle over the reduction of the work-day, for instance, has generated a flurry of medical studies over the problem of muscular fatigue, making of it, for the first time, a scientific concept (Rozzi, 1975, pp. 20, 158).

However, industrial psychology has continued to enclose workers into networks of constraints—the discourse of drives, attitudes, instinctual dispositions—built on the systematic mystification of workers’ “pathologies” and the normalization of alienated labor. Indeed, the task of the psychologist has been to negate the reality of the workers, so much so that most psychological studies from this period have no value, as Rozzi points out, other than from a historical/genealogical viewpoint. It is impossible, for instance, to accept with a straight face theories such as that of “accident proneness” (Brown, 1954, pp. 257-259) that were routinely used in the 1950s to explain the frequency of accidents in the American workplace and to affirm the uselessness of environmental improvements.

Psychology has also been essential to the reshaping of social reproduction, particularly through the rationalization of sexuality. The attention paid to Freud’s construction of a biologically based conception of femininity and its relation to the turn-of-the-century crisis of the middle class family (which he believed rooted in the excessive sexual repression of women) have overshadowed psychology’s contribution in this period to the disciplining of working class sexuality, and especially the sexuality of working class women. Exemplary is Cesare Lombroso’s theory of the prostitute as a “born criminal woman” (Lombroso & Ferrero, 2004/1893, pp. 144ff) which triggered a whole production of anthropometric studies, establishing any woman who challenged her assigned female role as a throwback to a lower evolutionary stage. The construction of “homosexuality,” “inversion,” and masturbation as mental disorders (e.g., Kraft-Ebbing’s 1886 Psychopathia Sexualis), and Freud’s “discovery,” in 1905, of the “vaginal orgasm,” belong to the same project. This trend culminated with the advent of Fordism, whose epoch making introduction of a $5 daily wage guaranteed to the worker the services of a wife, tying the right to sexual “satisfaction” directly to the possession of a wage, while making sex part of the housewife’s work-load. Not accidentally, proletarian women on the dole during the Great Depression were often kidnapped, when suspected of promiscuous behavior, and placed in the hands of psychologists charged with convincing them to have their tubes tied if the wished to regain their freedom. By the 1950s, penalties for rebellious women were even more severe, with the discovery of lobotomy, a treatment that was considered especially effective for depressive, non-performing housewives who had lost their zeal for domestic work. Psychology was also brought to the colonies to theorize the existence of an African personality, justifying the inferiority of Africans to European workers, wage differentials, and the politics of racial segregation. In South Africa, psychologists, from the 1930s onwards were also instrumental in the introduction of rituals of degradation that, under the guise of “heat tolerance tests,” prepared Africans to work in the gold mines, initiating them to a work-situation that deprived them of any rights (Buchart, 1998, pp. 93-103).

TURNING TO THE PRESENT

What do we learn from this complex history today? I think there are three lessons in particular. First, that the capitalist work-discipline requires the mechanization of the body, the destruction of its autonomy and creativity; and no account of our psychological and social life should ignore this reality. Second, by being complicit with
the transformation of bodies into labor-power, psychologists have violated the very presuppositions of their claim to science, discarding key aspects of the reality they were expected to analyze, like workers’ repulsion for the regimentation that industrial work imposes on our bodies and minds.

Most important, a history of the transformation of the body into labor-power reveals the depth of the crisis that capitalism has faced since the 1960s. This is a crisis the capitalist class has tried to contain with a global reorganization of the work process, but only succeeding in re-launching the contradictions that caused it on a more explosive level. For it becomes more and more clear every day that the mechanisms which guaranteed the discipline required for the production of value no longer operate. The movements of the 60s and 70s were a turning point in this respect, expressing a revolt against industrial labor that invested every articulation of the “social factory,” from the assembly-line to domestic labor, and the gender identities functional to both. “Blue collar blues,” industrial workers’ demand for “time out,” rather than for more money exchanged for more work, the feminist refusal of the naturalization of reproductive labor, the rise of the gay movement soon followed by the Transsexual Revolution, are exemplary in this context. They expressed a refusal to reduce one’s activity to abstract labor, to renounce the satisfaction of one’s desires, to relate to one’s body as a machine, and a determination to define our body in ways independent of our capacity to function as labor-power.

The depth of this refusal can be measured by the array of forces that have been deployed against it. The whole world economy has been restructured to contain it. From the precarization and flexibilization of work to the disinvestment by the state in the process of social reproduction—all these policies have attempted not only to defeat the struggles, but to create a new discipline based on the ubiquity and total hegemony of capitalist relations.

The institutionalization of precarity, for instance, has not only intensified our anxiety about survival, but created a worker that is depersonalized, adaptable, ready at any moment to change occupation (Berardi, 2009a, 2009b). Our sense of loss of identity and powerlessness is further intensified by the computerization and automation of work, that promotes highly mechanical, dehumanizing, militaristic types of behavior, in which the person is reduced to just a component of a broader mechanical system (Levidow & Robins, 1989). Indeed, the abstraction and regimentation of labor has reached today its completion and so has our sense of alienation and de-socialization. What levels of stress this situation is producing in our lives can be measured by the massification of mental diseases—panic, anxiety, fear, attention deficit, the escalating consumption of drugs from Prozac to Viagra. It has been argued that the success of “reality TV” is a product of this psychological sense of estrangement from our lives. For the desire to see how others live, what they do, and compare ourselves to them which, as Renata Salecl has shown, drives this branch of industry, reveals a sense of loss of life, though it obviously leads to more virtuality rather than a better hold on reality (Salecl, 2004).

Fear and anxiety caused by the uncertainty of survival are only one aspect of the terror that today is employed to suffocate the growing revolt against the global work machine. Equally important has been the militarization of everyday life, now an international trend, preceding September 11.

Witness the policy of mass incarceration adopted in the US in the 90s, and the proliferation of detention centers for immigrants throughout the EU. We have also seen an escalation in the severity and harshness of punishment, like mandatory sentencing,
“three strikes and out,” the use of taser-guns and solitary confinement, the increase in the number of women and children arrested (Williams, 2006, p. 205; Solinger, 2010; Donner, 2000; Tapia, 2010). Torture is now routinely practiced not only in the “war on terror” but in hundreds of US prisons. As Kristian Williams (2006) suggests, in American Methods: Torture and the Logic of Domination, these are neither anomalies, nor unintended effects of a derailing of justice. The militarization of everyday life punishes protest, checks the escape from the nets of economic restructuring, and maintains a racialized division of labor, asserting the right of the state to destroy the body of the citizen (Williams, 2006, p. 216). Indeed, today’s prison system does not pretend to have a reforming affect, functioning unambiguously as an instrument of terror and class rule (Williams, 2006, p. 216).

This massive deployment of force is what so far has contained the revolt against capitalist organization of work. But as capital’s inability to satisfy our most basic needs becomes more and more evident, the transformation of our bodies into labor power also becomes every day more problematic. The very instruments of terror are breaking down. Witness the increasing refusal of war and soldiering, revealed by the high number of suicides in the now voluntary US army, which is presently triggering a massive, multimillion dollar psychology “re-education”/“fitness” program. As for the institutionalization of precarity, this is a double edged weapon, for it sets the conditions for a radical denaturalization of dependent work and the loss of the very skills that sociologists have long considered indispensable in an industrial population. As Chris Carlsson has documented in his Nowtopia (2008), more people are seeking alternatives to a life regulated by work and the market, both because in a precarized labor regime work can no longer be a source of identity formation, and because of their need to be more creative. Along the same lines, workers’ struggles today exhibit patterns different from the traditional strike, reflecting a search for new models of humanity and new relations between human beings and nature. We see it in the interest for the discourse and practice of the “commons,” which is already spawning many new initiatives, like time-banks, community based accountability structures. We see it also in the preference for androgynous models of gender identity, the rise of the Transsexual and Intersex movements, and the queer rejection of gender, with all its implications concerning the sexual division of labor. We must also mention the globally spreading passion for tattoos and the art of body-decoration, which is creating new and imagined communities across sex, race and class boundaries. All these phenomena point not only to a breakdown of disciplinary mechanisms, but to a profound desire for a remolding our humanity in ways very different from, in fact opposite to those which centuries of capitalist discipline have imposed. How profound is the desire for a humanity not shaped by capitalist relations and the industrial organization of reproduction can be gauged by the popularity of a movie like Avatar, canonic in its anti-Cartesian celebration of “primitive life,” with its complete interpenetration of body and mind, the human, the natural and the animal, and its pervasive communalism.

Where will psychologists position themselves with respect to these phenomena? This, today, is an open question. Psychology has demonstrated its ability to transform itself and recognize the subjectivity of the subjects it studies. But it has not found the courage to break with Power. Despite the radical critique to which it was subjected in the 60s by dissident psychologists and psychiatrists (e.g., Guattari and Basaglia), mainstream psychology remains an accomplice of power. Psychologists today in the United States are actively engaged in the selection of torture techniques and methods of
interrogations. Unlike the American Psychiatric Association, the APA has so far refused to implement a resolution passed by its membership barring its members from participating in interrogation at sites where international law or the Geneva Convention are violated.

Psychologists are to blame not only for their actions, but also for their omissions. With few exceptions, they have not, for instance, critiqued as pathogenic the capitalist organization and discipline of work, and instead have accepted the sale of labor as a normal fact of social life, consequently interpreting the revolt against it as an abnormality to be suffocated in a discourse about fixed predispositions. A simple but telling example of this omission is the absence of any investigation into the significance and value of wage rates and particularly pay raises or pay cuts as (de)motivating factors. “Although there is a voluminous psychological literature on performance evaluation, little of this research examines the consequences of linking pay to evaluated performance in work setting” (Rynes, Gerhart, & Parks, 2005, pp. 572-3). Similarly, there is no recognition that mental disorders may be caused by such economic factors as unemployment, lack of health insurance, and rebellion against work. Instead, psychologists have followed economists in conducting “happiness studies,” in a renewed effort to convince us that positive thinking, optimism, and above all “resilience”—the new catch word in the sky of semantic disciplinary tools—are the keys to success. We can note, here, that the doyen of “happiness studies,” Martin Seligman, has lectured to the US Army and CIA concerning “learned helplessness” as part of the torture process, and has just received a $31 million grant from the US Army to train its soldiers to become more “resilient” to the traumas provoked by war, through the fitness program mentioned above (Greenberg, 2010, p. 34).

The time has come for psychologists to break out of the path that transforms the body into labor power, which inevitably leads from philosophy to terror and from psychology to torture chambers. It can no longer displace the pathologies provoked by capitalism onto a pre-constituted human nature, nor continue to produce straitjackets into which to force our bodies, whilst ignoring the daily violation of our bodily integrity at the hands of the economic and political system in which we live.

What would a psychology be like that measured the mental and physical damages caused by capitalism? That recognized that stress, anxiety, dread, insecurity, alienation from others and from oneself, are inevitable results of a system that normalizes the destruction of our livelihood, our social relations, our creativity? That would refuse to accept the transformation of living labor into dead labor as a norm, and therefore refused the use of torture, not only in its literal form, but in its daily appearance in the form of the capitalist organization of work? Answering these questions is the task ahead of us.

REFERENCES


Chapter 2

An experiential ethnography of a text-reader conversation:
Discovering mental illness

Dorothy E. Smith

University of Toronto and University of Victoria, Canada

SUMMARY

This paper experientially explores a text-reader conversation. Text-reader conversations are those unspoken dialogues between readers and texts. In such conversations, readers take on the text’s wording, not necessarily to agree or accept, but as an organizer of how they are responding. In this paper, the author draws on her own experience of reading a text about which, many years ago, she had made a detailed analysis. It is an account of someone becoming mentally ill that provides descriptions from the person who is describing the process of the kinds of behavior that led K’s friends to believe she is mentally ill. In re-reading the author’s original text, she discovered that her reading had been overmastered by the concept of mental illness. She had, in effect, adopted from the text a conceptual practice that organized how she then proceeded with her analysis. Her experiential account of how she had become, without realizing it, the agent of the text’s taken-for-granted use of the public discourse version of mental illness. The author does not disavow her previous analysis or suggest that it is invalidated. Rather she is discovering a dimension of her reader, as an actual practice, which she had not become aware of at the time.

INTRODUCTION

As a first step, this paper introduces institutional ethnography as a social science approach that grounds research and discovery in learning what people are doing and what’s happening to them, not focusing on them as individuals, but on how their activities or doings are coordinated with those of other. As an ethnographic approach, however, it does not remain with the observable but from within the everyday world of people’s experience reaches into the complex of objectified relations that rule contemporary society and exist only in and through the mediation of texts of all kinds—print, electronic, film, sound technologies, etc.

There is, therefore, a special interest in texts as they mediate and coordinate peoples’ doings. It is only by incorporating texts as in action into ethnographic practice that institutional ethnography has been able to develop explorations of sequences of action and social relations beyond local experience. Central to this approach is an insistence on always recognizing texts as they enter into the organization of sequences of action, whether in creating texts, passing them on or reading them, etc. This paper focuses on a particular moment in such sequences of action, that at which a reader actually engages with and activates a text—a site I am calling a “text-reader conversation”. Working with a particular theory of language identified with Mead (1934), Vološinov (1973) and Luria (1961, 1976), the problematic of the investigation described in this paper is that of how in reading the text, the reader takes on its language as organizing both her reading
and how she responds or takes it up. Working with a particular text, an account of someone becoming mentally ill, an experiential ethnography of its reading explicates how my reading was organized by the concept of mental illness as it has been established in public discourse and shows how the exclusionary practices that are associated with the public understanding of mental illness organize both the story told in the text, how K is represented as mentally ill, and how the reader, myself, participates in the exclusionary practices drawn into play by the concept.

**INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY**

Institutional ethnography as a social science does not start with theory, hypotheses, or within a definite and explicit schema. It begins always in peoples’ everyday experience. For researchers, it’s as if they step out of discourse into where they—or we—are as embodied beings. Of course, there’s a discourse, but now it’s recognized as someone’s, yours and others’ actual practices and coordinated activities in which texts as well as talk create connections. And institutional ethnographic discourse proposes an ethnographic practice that works from and with actual people, what they are actually doing (including in language) or what’s actually happening to them, but always viewed in relation to how activities are coordinated. But institutional ethnography does not remain with the directly observable. It takes up the local of people’s everyday lives and relates how things are happening with and for them, tying it into sequences of action that are hooked up into complexes of institutional, organizational and discursive relations beyond the observable and mostly beyond control.

When Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1973) were formulating the principles that would guide their exploration of the social relations of production they wrote:

Individuals always started, and always start, from themselves. Their relations are the relations of their real life. How does it happen that their relations assume an independent existence over against them? And that the forces of their own life overpower them? (p. 30)

The relations standing over against individuals that they explored were relations between people mediated or organized by the exchange of money for goods and goods for money. Institutional ethnography has discovered and sought to explore the relations of our contemporary world that objectify consciousness or subjectivity and organization so that, in a sense, they come to stand over against us. By objectify I mean here that these relations have come to exist and operate independently of particular individuals and yet they enter into our local actualities of our bodily being and we are active in them. These extraordinary yet commonplace modes of coordinating people’s doings exist only as texts coordinate people’s actions (Smith, 2001). Of special importance are texts that can be reproduced so that they can be read or seen in more than one place at more than one time and by more than one person. Institutional ethnography has made it possible to extend ethnography (Smith, 2005) beyond the locally observable and into these relations which institutional ethnographers have variously designated as “relations of ruling,” “ruling relations,” “extra- or trans-local relations.” However named, institutional ethnography recognizes always how people’s everyday lives are embedded in social relations beyond the local. Hence institutional ethnographies connect the everyday with translocal relations, sometimes as background presences, sometimes as what is to be explored and explicated.
In such explorations, it is important to avoid detaching texts from how they come into play in coordinating sequences of action. Texts have the unfortunate power for the ethnographer of appearing to stand alone and independent of the particular people, times and places in which they are being created or being read, watched or listened to. Partly influenced by my earlier reading of reader-response theory (Iser, 1978, 1985), I have become particularly interested in what I’ve come to call “text-reader conversation,” that is, the interchange that goes on between text and reader. For the ethnographer, that presents distinctive research problems simply because it is generally silent. Liza McCoy (1995), in a study of how wedding photographs are read, introduced the ingenious device of bringing together a small group including herself, the ethnographer, to talk about a set of wedding photographs taken at the wedding of one member of the group. Their conversation with each other was also an interchange with the texts, the photographs, they were being shown. Although the strategy she adopted is clearly not always available or appropriate her conception of the text as being activated by its readers is valuable in building in to any ethnography a reminder that the text becomes “alive” only as it is being read in a particular time, at a particular place, and by a particular individual or individuals. It is that reading as an active interchange between reader and text that will be explored in a particular case in what follows.

The problematic of the ethnography of reading a text that will be presented in what follows relies on a distinctive way of understanding how language coordinates subjectivities. It is a theory that enables an exploration of how the text that is activated by the reader organizes her reading and the sense she makes. This is a theory—or combination of theories—attending to how words construct bridges between subjectivities (Smith, 2005). Words (and their syntactic ordering) create, according to V.I. Vološinov (1973) an “interindividual territory.” He views the word as a “two-sided act” that is “the product of the reciprocal relation between speaker and hearer” (p. 86). We can find a complement to this view in George Herbert Mead’s conception of the significant symbol (or word, to simplify) activates the same response is speaker as hearer—hence presumably in the reader of a text though Mead tends to be fascinating by the phenomena of ongoing interchanges. Its special relevance to the experiential ethnography that follows is in making observable how the reader in activating the text takes on its language (words plus syntactic order) in organizing how she understands, interprets and responds to it. In a sense, just in reading and activating the text, the text dominates the reader. Of course, readers don’t always read the text just as it is written, or all the way through, or etc. But what is read organizes how the reader responds. In the text-reader conversation, then, the reader takes on the language of the text as she or he activates it; it becomes, however imperfectly, the reader’s own utterance. If we bring the text-reader conversation within this conceptual scope, we can see how in activating the text, readers take on the words of the text as organizers of the ongoing course of reading. In exploring how the text activated by the reader organizes the reading in the text-reader interchange, I am making use of a text which I analyzed and wrote about some forty years ago. It was published as a paper called “K is mentally ill: The anatomy of a factual account” (Smith, 1978). In rereading it later as an institutional ethnography and, in particular, with the examples of those institutional ethnographers who’ve used experiential methods in their research (such as Diamond, 1992; or de Montigny, 1995), I became aware of something missing from my analysis. I did not then have the awareness I have come to have through the work of institutional ethnographers of how
to take up and explicate the ethnographer’s own practices, her inside knowledge, if you like, of how institutional relations are put together in people’s actual practices.

THE TEXT

The interview was done by a student in a course I taught sometime in the late 1960s on the sociology of deviance. The point of departure was that mental illness was unlike other types of deviance in that there were no clear-cut criteria by which it is or was defined (Scheff, 1984) (this problem remains despite the psychiatric systematization represented by the ongoing development of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual—DSM). I suggested in class that one way of clarifying how the concept of mental illness is used would be to learn how someone came to be recognized as becoming mentally ill. Some students elected to take this on as an assignment for the course, using interviews with people who had had the experience of knowing someone who had become identified as suffering from a mental illness. The paper produced by one student is the basis of both the original analysis (Smith, 1978) and the present rethinking.

I first encountered the text of the student’s assignment in a presentation she made to the class. It was an account by a friend of a young woman I have called ‘K’ becoming mentally ill/being recognized by her friends as mentally ill; At that first hearing, I took it very much for granted that K was indeed becoming mentally ill. But then I read the text of the interview that student had done, a second encounter which made me think again. I became interested in just how it was that the account of K becoming mentally ill could on the one hand be entirely persuasive and on the other, very doubtful. My interest and analysis came to focus on just how the account of K’s behavior was put together to give full factual status to a representation of her as mentally ill.

My third reading of the interview has been undertaken as an experiential ethnography of the text-reader conversation. It comes all these years later and after I have learned rather different ways of thinking than those represented by the original analysis. In taking up the view of language I’ve sketched above, I have come to see that if I reread my analysis as an experiential ethnography, I can begin to make observable how the text controls and organizes the reader’s reading and in so doing I was drawn in by the instruction to read the text as an account of someone becoming mentally ill. My reading of the text was controlled by that conception; under its control I participated in the distinctive usages and practices that organized the representation of K as or becoming mentally ill. As concept of public text-mediated discourse, it carries what has been identified by Erving Goffman (1963) as a stigma and with stigma come, as we shall see, socially organized practices of excluding the person so identified from the taken-for-granted of social relating.

Viewing a concept such as mental illness as an organizing practice activated in a particular local setting by particular people can be tracked back to the thinking of Oxford “ordinary language” philosopher Gilbert Ryle (1949), who analyzed the “concept of mind” as a practice organizing thought and representation in philosophy. My particular focus in the experiential analysis that follows is what might be described as the social grammar of the concept of mental illness. How we generally view concepts is as ideas, something that’s in our heads. But from those theorists of language as well as from Ryle’s writing, we can recognize how concepts enter into and organize local social practices. I am suggesting that the concept of mental illness carries or installs a social grammar, an ordering of sequences of action or interaction among people when
someone among us has been defined as such. Here are some aspects of the grammar as applied to a particular person:

1. The person’s behavior is represented in isolation from their actual situation, relations and relationships; its ordinary sense is suspended.
2. There’s something like an instruction that says: “Don’t relate to this person as if they could look at the world in the same way and from the same place as you do;” avoid entering “we” relationships with them.
3. And another instruction that tells us not to take up what they do as something you build into your own activities; don’t take it seriously as a basis for action. Credibility is suspended; the ordinariness, the commonsense, of their doings is no longer taken for granted.

These together add up to what I call in my original paper (Smith, 1978) a “cutting out” process, a social interchange among people who knew K or, in my case, read about her, in which the ordinary ways in which someone is included in what we do and what we do is coordinated with their doings are suspended. Now revisiting the same text and reflecting on my own experiences and practices of reading, I have become aware of how I participated in the social grammar of exclusion that K experienced in being designated as mentally ill. In examining and reflecting on how the concept organized my reading, I have adopted a method used by other institutional ethnographers which I’m calling “doing an experiential ethnography.”

EXPERIENTIAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Experiential ethnography, relying on the ethnographer’s own experience, may sound doubtful. Imposing the objective-subjective dichotomy assigns it to the subjective. But that dichotomy does not apply. In institutional ethnography, the ethnographer’s own experience comes to have a distinctive role; it makes explicit the ethnographer’s local experience of being active in an institutional practice. Institutions exist only in standardized and generalized modes of textual coordination (Smith, 2001). Exploring them experientially and hence as local practice, makes observable just how the standardizing and generalizing characteristic of institutional relations are accomplished as local practices. In their dialogue with and within the discourse, ethnographers using this strategy make observable their own local production of institutional sequences of action.

Hence as an institutional ethnographic research method, experiential ethnography takes up the researcher’s own experience in and of a particular aspect of social relations in which she or he participates. Here’s an example: Gerald de Montigny (1995) wrote an experiential ethnography of how the social work discourse he had learned during his training came into play in the course of dealing with what was to become, institutionally, a case of child neglect/abuse. He describes how the categories and concepts of the discourse came into play as he entered an apartment where there was suspicion of child abuse. Now, as he goes through the apartment, he is looking for what will fit the categories of the provincial law on child abuse and neglect at that time (early 1980s). He’s looking towards what will be needed to entitle removing the child from the home and placing it in care and goes on to describe negotiating with the group home, preparing the report, appearance in court and so on.

Another and very different instance of an institutional ethnography using an experiential method is Tim Diamond’s (1992) ethnography of his working experience as
a nursing assistant in two old people’s homes. His work is actively engaged with care and provision of services to the old people resident in the home. He describes his work vividly and in detail, giving his, his co-workers, and the residents bodily presence. At the same time we find how the everyday of that work is organized by feeding and bathing schedules, by writing up charts, by the anticipation of municipal inspection, and so on. That institutional presence ties his experiential account into the institutional relations of elder care that are general in North America—though differing, of course, in local detail.

In both these, though in very different ways, the ethnographer’s experience, his dialogue with his ethnographic commitments, informs us about how his work participates in and “reproduces” the institutional relations in which it is embedded. In the experiential ethnography below, I am participating in and reproducing in practice “mental illness” as a concept that hooks me, the interviewer as well as the interview respondent to public discourse as a general complex of relations vested in mass media, the non-private functions of the internet, and so on.

In this re-reading of the text on which my original analysis of the story of K becoming mentally ill as a factual account, my experiential ethnography discovers how I had participated in the social organization of K’s exclusion from her circle of friends and acquaintances in the distinctive ways instructed by labeling her as mentally ill.

THE READER-TEXT INTERCHANGE: READING AN ACCOUNT OF SOMEONE BECOMING MENTALLY ILL

The story

The story told by the interview respondent is as a friend of K, the young woman who is being designated as mentally ill or becoming mentally ill. We have her voice as narrator, an occasional interpolation from the interviewer, and we have embedded in these details of what K was doing that was attributed to her progressive mental illness. There is a series of brief descriptions of something about what K was doing that doesn’t make sense. Not making sense is created by how what she does is contrasted with what does make sense. In reading these episodes as evidence of her mental illness, I, the reader relied on how working with the concept of mental illness told me to find them as abnormal in some way. It also told me how to assign and withdraw credibility: to accept the authority of she who tells the story and fail to notice that K’s voice and perspective are not presented.

Here are some examples:
1. We would go to the beach or the pool on a hot day, and I would sort of dip in and just lie in the sun, while K insisted that she had to swim 30 lengths.
2. When asked casually to help in a friend’s garden, she went at it for hours, never stopping, barely looking up.
3. She would take baths religiously every night and pin up her hair, but she would leave the bath dirty.
4. When something had gone radically wrong, obviously by her doing, she would blandly deny all knowledge.
5. It was obvious that she was terrified of anyone getting too near to her, especially men. And yet she used to pretend to us (and obviously to herself too) that she had this and that guy really keen on her.
If I had read these just as separate descriptions of someone’s behavior, it would never have occurred to me to treat them as indications of someone’s mental illness. I’ve known people who might spend serious time on makeup or hair care, but don’t clean out the bath. And, yes, I’ve known people who won’t admit to having done something amiss. And so on. I might get angry, certainly irritated; I might think that I don’t particularly like this person or that it’s time for me to get a new apartment-mate. But that’s not what was happening when I had taken on the concept of mental illness and that K had been designated as becoming mentally ill. I read those instances as odd; as somehow indicative of a developing mental illness.

Of course, each is set up so that practicing the concept of mental illness can locate the oddity of K’s action. Each puts in place the norm from which K’s behavior deviates. As well, the form of deviation is represented as anomalous—it isn’t that somehow K is behaving improperly; in these accounts, the normal and deviations from normal are set up so that what K is represented as doing doesn’t fit, is odd, is anomalous.

Take the first of these: We would go to the beach or the pool on a hot day, and I would sort of dip in and just lie in the sun, while K insisted that she had to swim 30 lengths. (24-6)

How to read this so that it can be understood as an indication of developing mental illness? Apply the concept of mental illness! I have learned that K is becoming mentally ill; I know how to practice the concept; I know how to read each instance of the oddity of her behavior so that I will find out how to identify what she does or says as abnormal. I know how to assign authority to the teller of the tale so that her version stands for me as veridical and I do not ask if K might have given an entirely different account of these events. I become a participant in the “cutting out” operation that deprives K of voice. Practicing the concept of mental illness, I know how to read the interview respondent’s own behavior “on the beach or [at] the pool” as the norm against which K’s obsessional swimming can be seen as odd. I, the reader, in activating the text as I read alone, join with the teller of tale in what might be described as a “cutting out” operation, an ongoing organizing of relationships among those who know K that constructs her as an outsider. Though we hear what her friends think, what the teller of the tale’s mother sees, we do not hear from K about her side of the story, and, working with the concept of mental illness, I, as reader, did not notice that absence. Here’s another instance: It was obvious that she was terrified of anyone getting too near to her, especially men. And yet she used to pretend to us (and obviously to herself too) that she had this and that guy really keen on her. (53-5)

As I, reading, take up what “was obvious,” I find K “pretending.” And thus I arrive at another anomaly. K is pretending to something which is “obviously” not the case and pretending to herself as well as to her friends.

What I am calling the “cutting out” process is described in the text of the interview as a sequence: one by one K’s associates come to be convinced that she has “something very wrong with her.” A series of steps can be identified in the story at each of which an addition is made to the circle of those who recognize or know that something is very wrong with K: first the person interviewed who tells the story to the interviewer, then a friend of hers and K’s, then her mother is added, and then another friend. Each move appears as independent; each appears to observe something about K that is odd. The independent observations of a sequence of individuals establish the factual status of K’s developing illness. As I was coming to know how to recognize K as becoming mentally ill, I was already practicing the same cutting out operation as those described in the text.
In the course of reading, I was drawn into the circle, reading the accumulating account of incidents of K’s non-normal behavior as evidence of her mental illness.

On my first reading I had simply taken for granted K’s developing mental illness. I thought I was familiar with a sequence in which the evolving of minor episodes add up eventually to an illness. But I read the interview text again, perhaps because I’d already begun to have some doubts. And went from there to making a careful analysis of just how the oddity of each instance of K’s behavior had been constructed. I cannot be sure in retrospect but I think that my doubts were engaged by the one place in which K is reported as saying something that could be critical of her friends and how they were relating to her. She is reported as using the phrase “and the little black sheep and the lambs.” Here is the passage from the interview text in which this appears:

At a third friend’s, Betty’s apartment, things came to sort of head. Betty is a Psychology major, and we had gone there by chance, with K, had dinner and settled down for a chat, when a boyfriend of Betty’s walked in, an easygoing friendly fellow whom K and I had not met before. K... was her usual retiring, sweet smiling self. Conversation was lively, but she did not take part. A boy was discussed, but K had not met him. However she suddenly cut in: Yes, isn’t he nice. Everything was quiet for a moment, but I carried on talking sort of covering up for her. A few minutes later she cut in again, with: Oh yes, and the little black sheep and the lambs... This was really completely out of touch. As I read this in doing my original work on the interview text, I think it was this that strengthened my focus on how rather ordinary events and actions become the “symptoms” of K’s developing illness. I translated my concerns into an examination of just how the story is told to establish the factual status of K’s mental illness. That was what my detailed analysis (Smith, 1978) aimed at.

This time around, I am attending to my reading differently. The one place where K is allowed to put forward her own account of what has been going on in her life would generate a very different reading of what has been going on. She is reported as speaking what can be read as a metaphor expressing her experience of the process of exclusion. A little leak in the dominance of the voices of K’s friends is created. Operating with the concept of mental illness would lead us to take as final the teller of the tale’s “This was completely out of touch.” But in experiencing consciously my own practices, I could recognize that there was an alternative way of understanding being presented here. Perhaps K was not “out of touch” when she spoke of the little black sheep and the lambs. Could it be that she had been experiencing and was speaking about what Edwin Lemert calls a “dynamic of exclusion,” that step by step her friends had formed and thereby closed a circle with her as outsider? And that in my conversation with the text and the conception of K becoming mentally ill that it had put in place, I had joined that circle and participated in its exclusionary practice.

All there was for this reader was this little leak and the suspension of the cutting-out process that operated as I practiced the concept of mental illness. Practicing that concept had deprived K of presence as a subject and speaker for herself. I could join in the cutting-out process because I knew how to practice the concept of mental illness and when called upon in my conversation with the text of the interview to apply it to an account of K’s developing illness, I knew just how to operate with it, how to read the little descriptions of her behavior (each one entirely unconvincing in itself), and how to join the exclusionary circle as it evolved. Exploring my practices of reading the text of the interview was also an exploration of a text’s part in public discourse. The interview
conception, the interview and the respondent, her friends, and the story she tells, drew me in as I activated the text in conversation.

In a text-reader conversation, the text’s power over the reader arises as she activates it in her reading. The reader takes on its language as organizer of her subjectivity. Of course, she may disagree; she may respond negatively, but what is already given organizes how and to what she responds. She has read and in reading, she has taken on how its language goes about meaning. My experiential ethnography of reading the interview respondent’s representation of K becoming mentally ill makes visible how the concept of mental illness went to work in me, becoming my own interpretive practice in making sense of the text and engaging me as participant in the “cutting out” operation that excludes and silences K.

CONCLUSION

This paper worked with an experiential method of writing an institutional ethnography. It has explored in retrospect how I read a text describing someone becoming mentally ill and it exposed how I took on a practice of reading that joined me to the circle of those described in the interview in excluding the voice and perspective of she who was designated as becoming or being mentally ill. My re-reading using an experiential ethnographic method brought into view what I had not recognized in my original study. I now could see and explicate how my own practice of the concept of mental illness organized my reading—and probably got built into my analysis. The latter does what it does, but it did not make me aware of how I participated in the process of excluding and silencing K. Furthermore, I did not recognize until my experiential ethnography how I took on the stigma associated with mental illness in public discourse. “Stigma,” of course, locates the social grammar of the process of exclusion and silencing of my participating in the “cutting out” process, in the social grammar of stigma. Recognizing how the university course from which the interview originated, the interview respondent’s own practices of the concept of mental illness, and the working through of the social grammar of stigma hook into the social relations of public discourse, becomes more visible as we see current efforts to change how mental illness is taken up. It is only recently that I have heard of attempts to bring about changes in public discourse’s standard practices of using the concept. In Canada, the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH) has instituted a Mental Health Awareness Week (http://miaw.ca/en/about/about.aspx) for September 2012. The aim is “to reduce negative stigma about mental illness amongst the general population and health care professionals.” As a social grammar, stigma locates exactly that “cutting out” operation described above in which I participated when I was reading the story of K becoming mentally ill before my experiential ethnography.

REFERENCES


CONSIDERING CURRENT AND ANTICIPATING FUTURE CONDITIONS
Chapter 3

Ubuntu, Qi and feeling:
An exploration of non-Western views of mind

Hans van Rappard
VU University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

SUMMARY

Occasionally it is wondered if a revision of our view of nature might be needed to resolve the mind-body problem. The paper suggests we take a look at non-Western philosophies. Two traditions that so far have never been mentioned together are gone into: Sub-Saharan African and Chinese philosophy. African philosophy is a tradition of Ubuntu (life force), while its Chinese counterpart is based on Qi (vital force). Both concepts suggest a dynamic, non-dualistic view of mind and matter. In an earlier paper a thematic link was developed between the concepts of consciousness of the Chinese philosopher Zhu Xi and Wilhelm Wundt. Building on this link the Wundtian concept of immediate experience is analysed against the background of Ubuntu and Qi. The resulting view is then extended to process philosophy. It is concluded that Ubuntu and Qi point to a revision of our physicalistic view of nature along process philosophical lines, and to a view of mind as feeling.

INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1990s Jonathan Shear, introducing an edited book on consciousness and the mind-matter problem wrote that some of his authors had expressed the need to “rethink nature” and to explore the hypothesis that consciousness might have to be understood as a “pervasive feature” of the universe (Shear, 1997, p. 6). One of these authors, Gregg Rosenberg, surmised that since we have grown accustomed so strongly to think of the physical as primary, we cannot but see consciousness as a mere “add-on.” The details of Rosenberg’s paper do not concern us here but his conclusion does. There may be, he suggested, “something very deep about the structure and character of nature that is missing from our current, purely physicalistic worldview. If I am right, then we must look for clues to tell us how our view of nature must be revised” (Rosenberg, 1997, p. 300).

I came across Rosenberg’s observation when I was co-authoring an essay on African and Chinese philosophy in which both traditions are studied from an intercultural-philosophical perspective for the first time (Kimmerle & Van Rappard, 2012). It occurred to me that perhaps one might find clues in these traditions—clues towards a “revised view” of nature that might shed new light on the mind-matter problem.

INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY

Until well into the 18th century there was a wide interest in Europe in non-Western philosophy. May it suffice here to mention Leibniz (1646-1716), who was infatuated with all things Chinese, including philosophy. Others took an interest in Indian thought.
In the 19th century however, this ecumenical attitude went out of favor. Hegel (1770-1831), who had studied Indian and Chinese thought, concluded that although these traditions contained many interesting ideas they were at best a Vorstufe of real, that is, European philosophy. Incidentally, Hegel's “Eurocentrism” emerged when shortly after 1800 the gross domestic product of the Western world overtook the Asian one (Jacques, 2009). Since Asia has been economically more productive than the West for eighteen out of the twenty centuries of our era one may wonder if the geopolitical shift currently taking place might bode problems for the future of the Western philosophical hegemony. But Hegel's influence did not entirely eclipse the Western interest in Asian thinking even if during the 19th century this did not come so much from philosophers as from linguists and missionaries. Grossly simplifying, it can be said that the result of their efforts are known today as comparative philosophy. A recent development, however, is the emergence of intercultural philosophy. The line between the two approaches is thin but an important difference is that the latter stresses the necessity of dialogue on the basis of equality. This is of course a clear departure from Eurocentrism, which, however, still reigns supreme.

**AFRICAN AND CHINESE PHILOSOPHY**

**Ubuntu**

The basic category of Sub-Saharan African thought is *Ubuntu* or “life force.” *Ubuntu* is a Bantu word but the concept of life force may be found under different names in most other parts of the vast area south of the Sahara. African philosophy does not know a hierarchy or chain of beings ranging from inorganic to organic and conscious beings. Life force is assumed to be in everything—in people, animals, and plants but also in rocks and thunder; everything under the sun is animated by spirits. With regard to human beings, the inheritance of *Ubuntu* means that no one can be thought of as an independent individual. The significance of *Ubuntu* to the human world has been formulated by the South African philosopher Ramose (1999), according to whom one’s humanity is affirmed by recognizing the humanity of other persons and, on the basis of this recognition, entering into relations with them. This view entails a perspective on society as consisting of intimately interrelated persons sharing the same life force. Hence, people are naturally embedded in a tribe or clan or other kind of society. A number of African thinkers have developed this into a “philosophy of we.” Moreover, since *Ubuntu* pervades everything, society is embedded in the natural world and, ultimately, in the cosmos. Thus, persons, society, nature and the universe all presuppose each other; they may be thought of as concentric circles with man in the central, innermost circle. In other words, *Ubuntu* entails that the mutual relations between human beings are not only a fundamental fact of life but, more than that, a fact of nature and the cosmos too. The cosmic order is conceived in terms of becoming and change. Thus, Sub-Saharan African thought entertains a highly dynamic worldview in which man shares the life force with everything else but, having been endowed with intelligence nevertheless occupies a central place. This does not mean, however, that something approaching a philosophy of mind was developed. But we may assume, I think, that since persons are pervaded by *Ubuntu*, it also inheres in what we are used to call the human mind. Indeed, there are traditional concepts that have a somewhat similar role. According to the Yoruba, life as a person begins with the infusion into the fetus of
a spirit or Emi, which gives it life and consciousness and is considered as essential for
diocination. Yet, animals and plants are also thought to have Emi. Moreover, being the
source not only of consciousness but also life, it is somehow connected to what is called
“divine breath.” Thus, it seems that in Emi consciousness and spirit coincide. In Akan
thought a similar concept, Okra, is found (Appiah, 2004). The Akan philosopher
Gyekye (as cited in Kimmerle, 2008) describes Okra as “the divine spark in the human
being … It constitutes the ‘individual’s life, the life force’ by making the body breathe
… When a person dies, her Okra leaves the body for good, to (re)join the world of
spirits” (p. 518). This is not much different from what was said about Emi. It is also
pointed out that Okra (and Emi come to that) had better not be translated as soul
because soul is understood in the West as immaterial, whereas Okra is what Gyekye
calls “quasi-physical” or “pneumatisical.” Though these terms are not particularly
enlightening, it is clear that whatever Okra (and Emi) are, they are not to be thought of
as purely immaterial. Here we touch on an as yet unmentioned aspect of Ubuntu and the
concepts connected to it: in the African view of man there is no dualism to be found;
matter and mind are not separated domains. While matter is pervaded by life force and
thus comprises the mental-spiritual aspect of reality, spirit and consciousness for their
part have a material side to them. Much of this will also be found in the Chinese
concept of Qi to which I now turn.

Qi

“Breath” provides a useful stepping stone from Ubuntu to Qi. The everyday meaning of
the ancient notion of Qi was, and still is, breath and vapor. At an early date this was
extended in philosophy to mean the energy or force assumed to be the cause of all
things in the universe. Because breath is an essential requirement of life, Qi was also
conceived of as vital energy and became a central concept in traditional Chinese
medicine. Blood, other bodily fluids, and the imperceptible streams of energy that
acupuncture works with were seen as Qi. An early text says “What lives does so by its
qi” (Zhang, 2002, p. 48). Elsewhere Qi is called the origin of life flowing between
heaven and earth in the form of ghosts and living in the hearts of sages (Cheng, 2003, p.
616). In the 3rd century BCE the notion was conceptualized as the metaphysical source
of everything. A further step in its philosophical development was the idea that Qi
makes the ten thousand things move and change. Thus, over many centuries the concept
of Qi was expanded to mean the source of the universe and the force behind its change
and transformation. Qi pervades reality and every change is change of Qi. Some
thinkers went further still and called it the “original Qi,” that is, the primordial unity
existing prior to the separation of heaven and earth. “The origin is qi. It arises from the
formless and when formed splits, making heaven and earth” (Zhang, 2002, p. 56). Now,
if Qi pervades everything, if it is the stuff of everything it must, in our western
terminology, be conceived of as mental and material (Van Rappard, 2011; see also
Morf, 2011). It should be kept in mind, however, that a mind-matter dualism (and a lot
of other Western dualisms, come to that) are not to be found in Chinese thought.

Qi has proven a thorny concept to translate: “material force” and “vital
breath/energy/force/power” indicate that Western equivalents are hard to come by,
because just like Ubuntu, Qi is material and mental. But there are more similarities:
both concepts denote some kind of stuff that makes up the universe, and both are
dynamic and non-dualistic. This means that the foundational concepts of two
philosophical traditions that at first sight are vastly different appear to have significant similarities. The most fundamental similarity however, is that both function in traditions that may emphatically not be called, philosophies of being.

**PHILOSOHY OF BEING AND PHILOSOPHY OF FORCE**

One of the most fundamental concepts in Greek philosophy is *Being*. The concept answers the question of the identity of things, of what it means for them to be. A good deal of one’s world view hinges on the nature of its answer. Generally speaking, the Western view tends to see the world as consisting of basic elements or building blocks that are extended in space and make up the world through spatial organization. Conceived thus, reality is fundamentally static and the business of philosophy is to determine the nature of the basic elements. In the 17th century the building blocks of the mind were identified as ideas, and philosophy conceived of mind as a kind of container or, in Rorty’s (1980) critical view, as an “inner space in which … ideas passed in review before a single Inner eye” (p. 50). In view of the following pages, it is important to see that this construal has given rise to the conception of ideas as “contents” of the mind, and of the mind as their “theatre.” Moreover, this conception is also responsible for the notion that the stuff of the mind is consciousness. Thus, mind came to be seen as mind-as-consciousness. Interestingly, it is impossible to find such notions in African and Chinese thought (Kimmerle & Van Rappard, 2012; Van Rappard, 2009). But there is yet another feature of the Western philosophical-psychological view of mind that is not to be found in them.

In his classic on the history of association psychology Howard Warren (1921/1967, p. 294), summarizing the school as a whole, found three slightly different interpretations of ideas: (1) as a reappearance in consciousness of an enduring impression in the mental substance; (2) as a new state of consciousness patterned or copied after the original; or (3) as a renewal of the original sensation in fainter degree. In other words, association psychology conceived of the building blocks of the mind as enduring and unchanging.

Let us see where we are. In our search for clues towards a revised view of nature two key-concepts of African and Chinese thought were introduced—*Ubuntu* and *Qi*, whose basic features appear to be fairly similar. Both concepts denote what Leibniz, speaking about *Qi* on the basis of a life-long interest in China called, “a subtle something” (Cook & Rosemont, 1994, p. 97), which makes up everything in the cosmos. It follows that *Ubuntu* and *Qi* are material and at the same time immaterial in a way that seems to defy translation into Western philosophical terms. Moreover, both forces are fluid and dynamic and as such essentially different from what is found in philosophy of being.

Admittedly, *Ubuntu* and *Qi* are broad and general terms and up until now the argument has proceeded in rather big steps. Yet, for present purposes we may, I think, conclude that the key-concepts under review and the traditions based on them may well qualify as “revised views.” Having said this, however, the question comes up, now what? How could ancient traditions, which have not yet been sufficiently articulated to the standards of Western philosophy, possibly contribute to a workable view on the mind-matter problem?

In an earlier paper a thematic link was construed between the views of consciousness of the 12th century Chinese philosopher Zhu Xi and Wilhelm Wundt (Van Rappard, 2011). Mediated by Leibniz’s interest in China and his influence on Wundt a connection was pointed out to exist between the latter and the *Qi* tradition.
What I intend to do now is, stressing *Qi* rather than *Ubuntu*, to demonstrate that (1) this connection comprises more than just Wundt’s concept of consciousness, and (2) that the Zhu Xi–Wundt line can be extended to current philosophy to suggest a clue towards a revised view of nature.

**QI-FORCE IN WUNDT**

As will be remembered by everyone who has taken a course in history of psychology, the basis of the psychological system designed by Wundt (1832-1920) is voluntarism. By this was meant that it were primarily volitional processes that presented themselves in inner perception. Voluntarism was pitted against the intellectualist stance prevailing in late 19th century psychology. However, volition was not intended to replace a bias towards cognition by another bias. Rather, what Wundt had in mind was to make room for the volitional processes and the feelings and affects connected to them, which up until then had lived a shadowy life in the philosophical-psychological mainstream. Thus, Wundt intended to establish a foundation for a comprehensive view of mental life—an enlargement of the conception of the mind that would make it big enough to comprise feeling (*Gemüth*) along with the intellectualistic ideas or representations (*Vorstellungen*) that were the successors of the 17th century ideas. But feeling is a spacious concept. In Wundt it may denote a psychological domain but it may also refer to relatively low degrees of consciousness. The latter kind of feeling occurs in the “field of consciousness” rather than the “field of attention.”

I return to Wundt on volition. As he saw it, psychology would remain incapable of getting a full picture of its mission until it realized that the volitional processes, which make themselves known to us as feelings, constitute the core and centre of the mind. Their central position is also apparent from Wundt’s view that they are the most primitive level of mental activity which, however, forms a continuity with the highest level, conscious apperception (Van Rappard, 2011). Having argued the crucial significance of the volitional processes, Wundt took the point an important step further when he concluded that hence, the mind was to be understood in terms of processes. In other words, the Wundtian mind is dynamic to the core; it consists of and presents itself as “fleeting events” (*fliessende Ereignisse*). Perhaps it is more adequate therefore, to avoid the noun “mind” when speaking about Wundt’s psychology and use “mental activity” instead. Interestingly, a conception of mind as comprising both feeling and cognition, and understood as an activity rather than an entity, may be found in the Chinese notion of *Xin*, which translates as heart-mind (Van Rappard, 2009).

In view of what was said about the enduring nature of the ideas in 17th century philosophy, it is important to see that the dynamic nature of the Wundtian mind also applies to the ideas or representations—these too, were emphatically viewed as dynamic or fleeting.

Having dealt with voluntarism, we turn to what must be one of the most frequently quoted concepts in the history of psychology: immediate experience. As we probably all recall the subject matter of Wundt’s psychology is immediate experience, which is opposed to mediate experience studied by the natural sciences. Like almost everything else in Wundt, the former refers to the dynamic nature of the mind. In immediate experience the mind presents itself as an on-going stream. But not just a stream. One is also immediately aware that it is structured; that is, the stream of mind appears to be a dynamic structure of ideas. As such it is also called, apperception or thought. But
however important this structure may be for a correct understanding of the mind, it is possible, Wundt concedes, to abstract from the apperceptive process and lift the ideas out of it. This can only be done however, at the price of ending up with enduring (beharrliche) ideas and the loss of the meaningful, dynamic whole of the apperceptive structure. This, Wundt says, is what happened to the ideas in British empiricism and association psychology. Thus, in immediate experience it is experienced immediately that ideas actually form part of an on-going stream or a dynamic structure. Borrowing a term from William James (who in many respects is quite close to Wundt), it can be said that immediate experience conveys “feelings of relation” (James 1890/1950, I, p. 245). But this has not yet explained what is so important about the immediacy of immediate experience.

“Immediate” here has two meanings: (1) actual, direct; immediate experience is given immediately, and (2) not mediated. This is the more important meaning. To give an example: I may say, “it’s hot”; but I may also say, “it’s 30 degrees.” The latter statement is an instance of mediate experience because it is a mediation of “it’s hot” by the abstract scientific concept of temperature-as-measured-in-centigrade. This brief example must be understood as an instance of the kind of abstraction mentioned above. The statement “it’s 30 degrees” abstracts or mediates the direct, unmediated experience of feeling hot, which is just a momentary part of the structured, meaningful stream of mental events. On the basis of his famous immediate/mediate pair Wundt maintained that fundamentally, only immediate experience is real and that mediate experience is but an abstraction from it. Thus, and that is the point, scientific, mediate experience may not be dualistically opposed to subjective, immediate experience. In other words, immediate experience is non-dualistic. And this, together with its dynamic nature means that the Wundtian mind shares two features with Qi (and Ubuntu, come to that).

Wundt left us almost a century ago and did not bequeath a school whose key-concepts might be reanimated. Thus, again, now what? As I hope to demonstrate in the final part of this paper, Wundt formed part of a broad philosophical movement even if he could not have been aware of this himself. But with the benefit of hindsight some of his ideas can be extended. The general direction of this extension has actually been suggested already by the frequent use of the term process. Indeed, we now turn to process philosophy, notably to its best known representative, A.N. Whitehead (1861-1949).

FORCE AND PROCESS IN WHITEHEAD

In Whitehead’s view, the mind-matter dichotomy is the result of what he called, the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness,” that is, mistaking our abstractions for concrete realities (Whitehead, 1925/1967, p. 51). This fallacy may also be described, I think, as mistaking our theoretical constructions for direct, actual experience. Take as an example the highly theoretical notion of ideas in 17th century philosophy. These were conceived of as clear and distinct contents of the mind, and as the only entities that could be experienced directly. This entailed an impregnable “veil of ideas” and hence an unbridgeable rift between mind and world. It also meant that mind was removed from nature. And another consequence, very important to Whitehead’s project, was that consciousness was seen as the “stuff of the mind.” By this he meant that consciousness was assumed to be the basic element or building block of experience. But this is not correct, he argued, it is not experience that presupposes consciousness but rather the
other way round; it is consciousness that presupposes experience. In other words, consciousness is not accorded a primary status even if this has consistently been the case in philosophical psychology and also, in the guise of representations, in classical cognitive psychology.

With regard to matter, the fallacy of misplaced concreteness resulted in no less nefarious consequences, such as its modern conception as having “simple location.” By this Whitehead meant that bits of matter are said to just be here in space and time without requiring reference to other regions of space-time. That is, matter consists of “slices of time” lacking any reference to past or future. Moreover, modern bits of matter are assumed to have no intrinsic value. They are “vacuous realities”, meaning entities devoid of experience (Griffin, 1998, pp. 117-124). But then, why should it be a problem that matter is not accorded experience? We will get back to this point but first, let’s ask ourselves again, where are we now?

We have learned that the mind-matter problem is seen as the consequence of a fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Because of this fallacy, Whitehead says, mind was construed as composed of consciousness, and matter as vacuous slices in time devoid of intrinsic value. Both abstractions, however, are too narrow for science. Keeping these statements in mind, the rest of the story of process thinking may, for present purposes, be presented fairly straightforwardly: since the mind-matter dichotomy results from mistaking the abstract for the concrete, the remedy suggests itself—return to the concrete! Put differently, what is needed to overcome the fallacy with regard to mind is to return to experience as given prior to abstraction; that is, experience as given prior to consciousness. With regard to matter we should return to the reality of matter prior to its modern physicalistic conception as vacuous reality.

In actual philosophical practice the required return to the concrete meant an enlargement of experience to the extent that everything in the cosmos is accorded experience. If it seems odd to assign experience to matter, it may be helpful to think of Whitehead’s concept of experience in terms of Leibniz’ monadology. Leibniz did not know a matter-mind dichotomy. In his view, the building blocks of the world were monads, some of which possessed a very low degree of activity and were called matter, while other monads, possessing high degrees of activity were called minds. Actually, there are many Leibnizian views in Whitehead, as there are in Wundt. Moreover, there are some notions in Leibniz that may also be found in the Chinese philosopher Zhu Xi (Van Rappard, 2011). I return to Whitehead.

Enlarging experience, Whitehead conceived of the building blocks of the universe as “actual occasions” or “events.” In his complicated terminology an event may also be called an “experience” or “feeling.” In the context of this paper the crucial point is that in Whitehead’s conception of the event/experience/feeling cluster matter and mind are united. This is achieved by construing reality as an endless stream of actual events (cf. Wundt’s fleeting events), and just as in Wundt this stream has been assigned a lot of philosophical work. As Whitehead saw it, every event is extremely short-lived and as soon as it is gone it is succeeded by a new event. But new events do not stand alone because all contain something of their predecessors and are thus related to the past and, more than that, form part of a coherent stream. Since the number of predecessors increases with time, each new event contains ever more past events and this is why Whitehead calls the event/experience/feeling stream a creative process. This means that while the Whiteheadian present forms part of a continuous process of becoming, the past is an aggregation of static entities, that is, the past is a matter of being (cf. above).
This brief rundown of a couple of pertinent topics of Whitehead’s process thinking should suffice to demonstrate why in his view the physicalistic construal of matter as passive and inanimate can only be maintained as long as scientists overlook or abstract from what is given in actual experience. And only as long as psychologists follow their colleagues in their abstraction fallacy is it possible for them to see consciousness (ideas or representations) as the basis of mind. Actually, however, the basis of mind is experience, aka feeling. In short, it is our clinging to abstraction, that is, the “simplified edition of immediate matters of fact” that causes us to remove mind from matter (Whitehead, 1925/1967, p. 52).

CONCLUSION

This paper has addressed the question if in non-western philosophy clues might be found to a view of nature bridging the matter-mind abyss. To this end, the African and Chinese traditions were looked into. It was demonstrated that in both a fundamental force obtains, Ubuntu and Qi, which comprises what in Western philosophy is called matter and mind. It was then pointed out that the basic features of Qi (and Ubuntu for that matter) were similar to some of the basic concepts of Wundt’s psychology. And it was finally demonstrated that these similarities also held for the process views of Whitehead.

This means then, that process in the sense of a stream of events/experiences/feelings may be a workable translation of Ubuntu and Qi, and that these concepts point to process thinking as providing clues towards the revised view of nature that we set out looking for: “a deeper view of nature, a view which somehow gets under physics” (Rosenberg, 1997, p. 289). Finally, it should be mentioned that Ubuntu and Qi seem to suggest a view of mind as feeling instead of consciousness.

REFERENCES


Chapter 4

Darwinian aesthetics:
Criticizing the good-gene hypothesis of physical beauty

Nora Ruck
University of Vienna, Austria

SUMMARY

This paper offers a twofold critique of evolutionary psychological attractiveness research, a research field located within the so-called “evolutionary psychological paradigm.” In a first step, I show weaknesses in empirical studies of evolutionary psychological attractiveness research. In a second step, I ask why this paradigm has, despite these scientific shortcomings, succeeded in taking over such a defining role within the field of evolutionary psychology, and in spurring as much public and popular scientific attention as it did. I suggest that its success has to do with my second locus of critique: It has a decisive role in stabilizing contemporary social order with its power relations and gendered divisions of labor.

INTRODUCTION

When preparing this paper, I stumbled across evolutionary psychological accounts of female physical beauty four times in the media. First, in the weekly magazine Profil; second, in a ProSieben TV feature called Sex Report; third, in a free take-away commercial magazine by the drug store chain DM; and fourth, in the science section of the Austrian newspaper Der Standard. All these articles featured either Austrian evolutionary psychologists from a research group around Karl Grammer or un referenced theories promoted by this group. I introduce these examples because they capture a feature of evolutionary psychology that has been analyzed as part-and-parcel of its growing success over the last twenty years or so (cf. Cassidy, 2005, 2006): Evolutionary psychologists have very actively taken their public relations in their own hands since the 1990s. Discourse analytically speaking (e.g., Jaeger, 2010, p. 96), they have actively mediated between the specialized discourse of science and everyday discourse by writing popular books (e.g., Buss, 2003; Pinker, 2002), by giving interviews on a regular basis, and by taking part in public scientific controversies.

In the following, I will first specify the kind of evolutionary psychology that has figured so prominently in popular discourse. It is not the only game in town, but it is currently the most successful and publicly visible evolutionary account of human psychology. In a second step, I will employ the method of feminist empiricism as a kind of immanent critique of evolutionary psychological research on physical attractiveness. In a third step, I want to go beyond immanent critique and ask about the function of evolutionary psychology in public discourse. Along these lines, I define evolutionary psychology as a discursive strategy to regulate the realm of the (publicly) speakable.
THE EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGICAL PARADIGM

Most popular appearances of evolutionary psychology feature a specific kind of evolutionary psychology that has been called the evolutionary psychological paradigm by David Buller (2005). It is pursued and promoted by widely influential authors like John Tooby, Leda Cosmides, David Buss, Steven Pinker, and science journalist John Wright, among others. Their perspective dominates the field of evolutionary psychology, and sometimes makes it seem as if there was only one evolutionary approach to psychology—theirs (cf. Lloyd, 2008; Maiers, 2002). Whenever I employ the terms evolutionary psychology and evolutionary psychologists in the following, I am only referring to this paradigm with its respective proponents and not to the wealth of additional psychologists employing other evolutionary perspectives.

Human nature in evolutionary psychology

Evolutionary psychologists hold that contemporary humans are biologically and psychologically adapted to a certain phase in human pre-history called the “environment of evolutionary adaptedness” (Buss, 2005, p. 2). It is also referred to as the “Pleistocene” and is believed to be located in the East-African Savannah and have lasted from approximately 1.8 billion to 10 000 years B.C. This focus on the Pleistocene goes along with the claim that much behavior observed among contemporary humans is actually adapted to the Pleistocene—such a behavior is called an “adaptation” (Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). An adaptation is specified as a genetically stabilized solution to problems the early humans are said to have regularly encountered. The evolutionary psychological program is thus called “adaptationism” both by critics (cf. Swami & Furnham, 2008, p. 24; Gould & Lewontin, 1979, 581ff) and by self-characterization (Symons, 1992).

The mind is said to consist of “functional specializations” (Barrett & Kurzban, 2006, p. 629) that are called modules. Evolutionary psychological examples of such modules exert a high level of specificity. Steven Pinker, for example, claims modules for phenomena like: “An intuitive version of biology or natural history” (Pinker, 2002, p. 220) or “[a]n intuitive economics, which we use to exchange goods and favors. It is based on the concept of reciprocal exchange” (p. 221), and many others.

The alleged functional specialization of the sexes

The alleged universal design of the human mind is undercut by one supposedly universal biological difference: Difference between the sexes (cf. Gould, 2000). Pinker (2002) claims that from an evolutionary psychological perspective, men and women “differ in at least one way that is major and systematic: they have different reproductive organs” (p. 144). Building on theories of Donald Symons (1979) and Robert Trivers (1972), David Buss (2003) insists that men’s and women’s reproductive organs and, by extension, parental investments, mating strategies, and partner preferences, differ in the following way: Men’s sperms are small, plentiful, and relatively “un-costly.” Therefore, evolutionary psychologists reason that men should profit from spreading as much semen as possible to as many women as possible. By contrast, women’s eggs are big, scarce, and “costly.” Evolutionary psychologists argue that they would be better off sparing their precious eggs for the one man that would care enough to “invest” in offspring they
would have together. Note that, between the lines, it is assumed that men control economic resources whereas women control reproductive resources, as evident from the following speculation about women and “casual sex.” Says Buss (2003):

One key benefit of casual sex to women, however, is immediate access to resources. Imagine a food shortage hitting an ancestral tribe thousands of years ago. Game is scarce. The first frost has settled ominously. Bushes no longer yield berries. A lucky hunter takes down a deer. A woman watches him return from the hunt, hunger pangs gnawing. She makes him an offer for a portion of the prized meat. Sex for resources, or resources for sex—the two have been exchanged in millions of transactions over the millennia of human existence. (p. 80)

In this quote it becomes clear that in evolutionary psychology even sexual desire is subjected to the logic of exchange—a hetero-normative, reproduction-biased logic of exchange which, according to Pinker, should come “naturally” to human beings because it is supposedly grounded in “intuitive economics” (Pinker, 2001, p. 221).

Evolutionary psychological attractiveness research is by far dominated by the “good gene” hypothesis of physical beauty. Since choosing a partner in order to reproduce oneself is considered a “challenge” of the Pleistocene environment, evolutionary psychologists reason that men and women should have developed different mental modules in order to detect desired qualities in members of the other sex. The general belief is that men should place more value on the physical beauty of a potential partner than women. Men are said to want only a few things in a woman: Youth, beauty, chastity and fidelity (Buss, 2003). Among these criteria, female physical beauty is considered the most “reliable” “ornament that signals quality” (Thornhill & Grammer, 1999, p. 105), i.e., “reproductive value” (Buss, 2003, p. 59). Men, by contrast, are believed to communicate their economic resources by means of many signals. Women should thus value a great many other things: economic capacity, social status, ambition and industriousness, intelligence, compatibility, size and strength, good health, and love and commitment. The central premise of the good gene hypothesis is thus that physical beauty is a sex-specific indicator of “genetic quality”, communicating “economic resources” in the case of men and “reproductive value” in the case of women.

FEMINIST EMPIRICISM: QUALITY OF EVIDENCE

What is one supposed to make of this research from a feminist and critical psychological perspective? From the view point of feminist empiricism, one would first have to ask: What is the available evidence and what is its quality? Evolutionary biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling has suggested four evolutionary biological standards for evaluating evolutionary psychological research, of which I will focus on two: “First, of course, is there a good fit between the hypothesis and data? Second, is the evolutionary explanation as good as or better than some proposed alternative?” (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p. 181).

On the most general level, evolutionary psychological data are mostly not a very good fit with the respective hypotheses because the hypotheses relate to the Pleistocene whereas experimental studies are usually conducted with contemporary populations, mostly undergraduate students at American or other universities. In the context of the good gene hypothesis, the fit between hypothesis and data is a continuous subject of debate exactly because the hypothesis has regularly been falsified. In a review article, Jason Weeden and John Sabini (2005) summarized the available evidence from studies
of the good gene hypothesis and concluded that there was hardly any reason to believe that physical beauty had any correlation with physical health.

In 1998, the good gene hypothesis was falsified by a study correlating attractiveness and health status of more than three hundred participants in the so-called Intergenerational Studies (undertaken in California in the 1920s), whose photographs and health statuses were available in the files (Kalick et al., 1998). The authors found no correlation between physical beauty and health, but they did find a tendency among contemporary raters to overestimate the physical health of beautiful people when asked to guess the health of people whose photographs were shown to them. In fact, the study confirmed a competing evolutionary theory on physical beauty that is more Darwinian in the orthodox sense: Darwin (1871) believed that physical beauty was a function of mere taste. So much for the second criterion: The good gene hypothesis is not better than alternative evolutionary psychological explanations, let alone social psychological or sociological explanations that have not yet directly been confronted with the good gene hypothesis. In a comparable vein, however, Buller (2005) has shown that in a direct confrontation of Buss’s (e.g., 2003) evolutionary psychology of mating with sociological theories, the latter win the battle.

What is interesting is the reaction of good gene theorists once they are confronted with experimental falsifications like Kalick’s and colleagues’ (1998). Randy Thornhill and Steven Gangestad, for example, dismiss this study because its results are supposedly “not directly relevant” (Thornhill & Gangestad, 1999), with their reasons being:

Firstly, the concept of health status considered here is a broad one, as noted above, not merely disease incidence. Secondly, this perspective predicts that attractiveness should have been related to phenotypic condition in environments of evolutionary adaptedness (EEA)—the evolutionary environments over the last several million years that were the selective forces that ultimately caused human-specific adaptations. (p. 453)

Thornhill and Gangestad rhetorically immunize themselves against critique: First, they broaden the concept in question enough for it to be untestable, and second they dismiss studies on contemporary humans as irrelevant only when they falsify their own predictions while Thornhill and Gangestad themselves use studies on contemporary humans to argue their case. Thornhill and Gangestad seem to suggest here that their hypotheses could only be falsified by data from the Pleistocene. But, as Buller criticizes, it is hard to imagine how scientists could ever have enough knowledge about the structure of Pleistocene society and psychology in order to formulate the specialized problems that allegedly gave way to such specialized solutions. Up to now, the available evidence only allows for the formulation of hypotheses that are “so coarse-grained … as to be wholly uninformative about the selection pressures that act on a species” (Buller, 2005, p. 97).

**EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY: A DISCURSIVE STRATEGY TO ALTER THE REALM OF THE SPEAKABLE**

Given the weak empirical support for evolutionary psychological attractiveness research, its success can hardly be explained by the solid nature of its scientific evidence. Discourse analytically speaking (cf. Jaeger, 2001), it makes more sense to
understand evolutionary psychology as a discursive strategy of both restricting and expanding the realm of the speakable both in the public and within the academia.

Public presence of evolutionary psychology

The public presence of evolutionary psychology I used as an introduction to my paper is rather usual for evolutionary psychology. Angela Cassidy (2005) has shown that the media coverage of evolutionary psychology in the United Kingdom in the 1990s was so high that it outnumbered the academic coverage by far. It was only after 2000 that the academic coverage started to increase, whereas the media coverage declined. Cassidy goes so far as to interpret the second observation as a result of the first: Evolutionary psychologists, so she says, compensated for their lack of academic respectability by engaging in public debates and by aiming at a broader audience with their publications. According to Cassidy, these efforts paid off. Cassidy’s observations gain even more weight considering that British sociologist Hilary Rose (2000) deemed the intellectual context in the UK as rather hostile to evolutionary psychology in the 1990s, whereas evolutionary psychology was in her view well received and already very popular in the United States in the 1990s.

Reasons for evolutionary psychologists’ engagement in public discourse might be twofold. Cassidy (2006) suggests that it initially had to do with evolutionary psychologists having a hard time within academia. It might, however, also be related to the fact that many controversies surrounding evolutionary psychology are in part a continuation of the somewhat older so-called sociobiology controversy (see Segerstrale 2000) of the 1970s and 1980s. Discourse analytically speaking again, the sociobiology controversy might be considered a “discursive event” (Jaeger, 2001, p. 89), i.e., an event that has shaped the form and content the discourse would take from then on.

The sociobiology controversy: Expanding the realm of the speakable

Sociobiology has, from the inceptive publication of Edward O. Wilson’s Sociobiology: The New Synthesis in 1975, been an attempt to broaden the realm of the speakable. This agenda can be paraphrased as “It must be possible to speak about the biological basis of human social and psychological affairs.” The book was soon criticized by the so-called Sociobiology Study Group of Science for the People that included, among others, evolutionary biologists like Ruth Hubbard, Stephen Jay Gould, and Richard Lewontin (see Allen et al., 1975). The critics played a crucial role in making sociobiology known to the public in the first place. The main point I want to make about this controversy is that the critics blamed Wilson for adhering to a biological determinism that would serve to legitimate oppression and social inequality. Wilson (1975b), in turn, accused the critics of acting out a kind of censorship, thus doing damage to academia. This opposition in the sociobiology debate seems crucial to me because it was picked up by evolutionary psychology when it took off in the 1990s. Importantly, evolutionary psychologists themselves started to employ a special kind of censorship that was starting to be discursively available in the 1990s but certainly had not been in the 1970s and 1980s: The indirect censorship of attacking so-called “political correctness.”
Evolutionary psychology and anti-political correctness:  
Restricting the realm of the speakable

“It must be possible to talk about the biological foundation of social and psychological phenomena”—evolutionary psychologists continued this impulse to broaden the range of the speakable from sociobiology. With John Tooby’s and Leda Cosmides’ theoretical core work The Psychological Foundations of Culture from 1992, evolutionary psychologists have also begun to restrict the range of the speakable: “It must not be possible anymore to speak about social and psychological phenomena from a certain perspective” would be the new credo that was established with their attack on the so-called “social science standard model” (Tooby & Cosmides, 1992, p. 24). In terms of content, this model is supposed to claim that humans are “blank slates,” i.e., that they are born psychologically “empty” and are equipped with all they psychologically and socially need by culture or society. In terms of scientific positions, the social science standard model can, in a rather vague take-your-pick manner, be equated with social constructionism, post-structuralism, science studies, anthropology, (some) sociology, Marxism, feminism, or relativism (cf. Derksen, 2010).

Evolutionary psychologists routinely complain about a certain “taboo” on biology (e.g., Pinker, 2002) that was supposedly established during the 1930s in the USA and after the Second World War in European countries. These complaints accumulate whenever evolutionary psychologists talk about supposedly biological sex differences and about how evolutionary psychologists were allegedly attacked for naturalizing gender inequality, rape, and other phenomena. Many sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists have supposedly become “victims” of this taboo; they have been, laments Pinker, “picketed, shouted down, subjected to searing invective in the press, even denounced in Congress. Others expressing such opinions have been censored, assaulted, or threatened with criminal prosecution” (Pinker, 2002, p. vii).

In Edward Hagens 2005 paper Controversial Issues in Evolutionary Psychology, which appeared in Buss’s Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology, the invocation of censorship and taboo is finally coupled with the phrase political correctness. The author dedicates an entire chapter to matters of “Political Correctness” (Hagen, 2005), claiming that “inevitable research that calls into question assumptions underlying popular moral and political views will, in effect, be heresy, and heresies are, as a rule, viciously attacked” (p. 166). Political correctness is in this view just a synonym for “untrue” or “incorrect”; “political incorrectness” is, in turn, seen as an immediate access to truth.

Political correctness as ideological code

With Dorothy Smith (1999), I regard the term political correctness whenever it is used to direct a certain discourse as an ideological code. The term has a rather curious history. In the 1960s, American leftists would sometimes use “politically incorrect” somewhat self-ironically in order to demarcate what in their opinion could be said and what could not. From the 1990s on, use of the term political correctness experienced a boom in the United States. It started off as a conservative attack on the university system, mainly launched by right-wing think-tanks and soon targeted the humanities in general. In the meantime, it had reached Europe, too. Studies in Germany and Austria (Auer, 2002) have shown that the term political correctness is mainly used by ultra-
right-wing groups, mainly in order to de-legitimate leftist, anti-racial, and feminist critiques of the status quo.

Smith calls the term political correctness an ideological code and an “organizer of public discourse” (Smith, 1999, p. 172), thereby providing a powerful tool to understand its discursive function. Discourse, in Smith’s view, exists within people’s social relations, i.e., within the ruling relations of a particular society and time. In a society that is “largely organized by text-mediated relations” (p. 175), theories, concepts, and ideologies exert a particular power as they regulate text-mediated relations. As a means to control discourse, ideological codes are far less visible than censorship. Smith (1999) describes their operation in the following way:

Ideological codes don’t appear directly, as they do in an act of censorship; no one seems to be imposing anything on anybody else; people pick up an ideological code from reading, hearing, or watching, and replicate it in their own talk or writing. They pass it along. Once ideological codes are established, they are self-reproducing. (p. 175)

Ideological codes are a typical form of power-struggle in liberal states (Smith, 1999). Political correctness implies that there is an attack on “freedom of speech,” an attack usually ascribed to leftists, feminists, anti-racists and others involved in social movements. Freedom of speech in liberal societies, however, is actually a constitutional means of limiting state power in order to make it possible for citizens to speak in their own interests. The same constitutions that prescribe citizens’ freedom of speech do not, though, “protect the openness of public discourse against those positioned to regulate discourse” (p. 175). Smith makes a crucial point here: Freedom of speech is not a matter of the relations of social agents and their diverging interests and opinions; it is a matter of the relation between the state and its citizens. Claiming that freedom of speech is primarily relevant between social agents is in fact itself a discursive strategy to control public discourse. According to Smith, this strategy is used by traditional elites who are reluctant to lose their authority in the public sphere and their privileges in society. It is also a strategy used to prevent the less powerful members of society from speaking in their own interest.

IT MUST BE POSSIBLE TO TALK ABOUT SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

Smith’s (1999) take on political correctness as an ideological code helps us understand the discursive strategies of evolutionary psychology better. The continued evolutionary psychological attacks on “political scientists” (Pinker, 2002, p. 105) and their claims that legislative measures like “affirmative action” or “quotas” have produced a kind of “reverse discrimination” against men or white Americans, for example, give credence to Susan MacKinnon’s rather cynical claim that evolutionary psychology is a kind of “neo-liberal genetics” (MacKinnon, 2005, title page).

Smith defines political correctness more concretely as an ideological code that regulates “the intertextualities of public discourse, particularly at the points of intersection between universities and social movements” (Smith, 1999, p. 172). Attempts to untie social movements and science were already visible in Wilson’s (1975b) reaction to his critics, with Wilson being very clear that he was only willing to conduct a discourse within academia. Accordingly, he was most concerned with academic freedom and not so much with wider societal questions. Similar dynamics
hold for evolutionary psychologists. Granted, they are writing for the public, and they are very concerned about academic freedom as long as it means that one is freely able to talk about biological universals and differences. But this freedom of speech only holds for these matters, and in fact it mostly holds for academia which is supposed to enlighten the public about the “real truth”. The public in turn, i.e., social agents, are supposed to act according to this truth: The “moral sense of the time”, claims Pinker (2002, p. 138), is going to adjust to the “new biological facts” (p. 138) discovered by evolutionary biologists and their likes.

If this were true, i.e., if the moral sense of “our” time was supposed to adjust to evolutionary psychological facts, “we” would have to act according to the evolutionary account of gender differences and of biological inequalities in general. To be sure, Pinker does not advocate the view that biological “facts” should determine moral actions. In Pinker’s (2002) view of the moral sense this would not even be possible; biologically, says Pinker, humans harbor antagonistic moral feelings, some of which may be egoistic, while others are altruistic or sympathetic to others. While claiming to establish a “common ground” (p. 282) between extreme ideological positions, Pinker in fact constantly polemicizes against both arguments grounded in collective action and calls for (gender) equality. He is most affirmative when it comes to threats to (neo)liberal economy, warning, as he does in a rather popular science article in General Psychologist that denying individual differences would lead to:

the tendency to treat more successful people as larcenous. That is, if you really believe that everyone starts out identical, and you look around and you see that some people have more stuff than others, the temptation is to think that they must have stolen more than their fair share. (Pinker, 2006, p. 5)

One might ask whose morals are spelled out in the above quote. Smith (1999) is very outspoken in her view that attacks on political correctness serve the interests of traditional elites and the current capitalist class; dismissing critiques of the current social order as censorship or taboo by “the politically correct” is in turn a means to prevent the weaker members of society to speak in their own interest and to preclude others from speaking on their behalf.

To be sure, many feminists agree on the fact that language politics alone will not do away with structural inequalities. Karsta Frank (1996) thus criticizes political correctness for creating an illusion of inequality when in fact there are still powerful structural differences at work. The still mainly gendered division of labor, with women being responsible for unpaid reproductive and “care” labor while men conduct productive labor and control the greater share of economic resources is one of these (for Europe, see European Institute for Gender Equality, 2011). Evolutionary psychology also creates an illusion: An illusion of accomplishment—the illusion of an already egalitarian society—while at the same time naturalizing existing social inequalities. In the hands of the privileged, evolutionary psychology becomes a means of both naturalizing the current ruling relations and of doing away with criticism.
REFERENCES


Chapter 5

Postmodern shame: Self-effects and emergent productions

Steve Larocco
Southern Connecticut State University, USA

SUMMARY

In the postmodern world, shame has changed significantly from how it functioned and was experienced in earlier times, especially modernity. Rather than serving as an emotion that exposes a person as being riveted to a deficient or derelict form of being, postmodern shame is tied rather to transient self-effects, which can be adapted or changed, especially through new technology and social media. As identity has become more fluidly performative, shame has become lighter, thinner, and more mobile, a spur to the production of new social performances rather than simply a destruction of one’s sense of being or identity; of who one is or has been. In the mirror of technological possibilities for self-production, shame can be evaded by simulating anew who one is. Though older forms of shame still exist, they remain residual, and the new form of shame, which is emergent, has come to predominate.

SHAME AS A SOCIOHISTORICAL PHENOMENON

As the world has become postmodern, the notion that any actuality is “natural” has become increasingly suspect. The new postmodern understanding is that all actualities are socially constructed; that is, their manifestation is an effect of the social world and does not precede it. In this theoretical framework, phenomena formerly taken to be “things” or “essences” such as gender, identity, race, etc. are now taken to be fully the result of social and semiotic forces, structures and processes. As a result, such phenomena have become fully historical; they can be scrutinized and analyzed as the outcome of specific histories and, as phenomena, may exist in their currently named form only in the historical moments that produced them. This theoretical orientation allows a new analytic scrutiny of many phenomena.

One such phenomenon is shame, an emotion that might have seemed, to earlier theorists, to be always the same across the arc of history, an instance of the idea of the universality of basic emotions, but which I will argue undergoes significant historical change. Though there are cogent affiliations between the experiences of shame in different historical moments, there are also significant alterations. These modifications are the result of divergent formations of the self, or perhaps, more precisely, the subject, that are also tied to historical change and largely determine the precise sociopersonal matrices in which shame occurs. What I will argue specifically is that postmodern shame has changed in significant ways from its modern precursors, having become thinner, more mobile, less a feeling of unbearable deficit and dereliction, or of an unbearable incongruity between one’s fantasy self or ego and one’s perceived self or ego, and more a momentary feeling of dissonance with a social world that can be left behind or accommodated and refashioned in the continual reconstruction of self and self-effects that marks postmodern existence. Rather than being a form of social
destitution or death, shame in postmodern life emerges when social forces (whether interpersonal or more abstract) mark a certain version of selfhood as inconsonant with smooth or desired social functioning. This version of self, this self-effect, can then be left behind, revised, presented to a different audience or simply performed differently. As identity has become less fixed, so too has shame, and it is this new, fluid, somewhat itinerant version of shame that marks its postmodern forms of instantiation.

Shame, according to the microsociologist Thomas Scheff (1990), is, in its modernist manifestation, a relentlessly social emotion, arising in the busy, interactive, and often fraught junctures where psyche and the social field interface, intermingle and contend. In its nascent, primal structuring through the intense interplay between primary caregiver and child, shame first emerges as a decelerating or damping response to intense or exuberant emotion-driven behavior that clashes or jangles with the affective state or desired affective state of the caregiver. Chastened by the caregiver’s failure to mirror, the toddler affectively wilts; the beginnings of an experience of what we conceive as shame, which serves at least momentarily to suppress further emotional expression (Schore, 1994, 2003a, 2003b).

As the child grows and develops, and as it learns to structure at least some of its mental processes around the complex, stabilizing construct that is conventionally called the “self,” this suppressive response acquires a broader social dimension and configuration. Shame then becomes not simply a suppressive response to an affective mismatch between the individual and the social surround (at first the primary caregiver); instead, shame manifests as a more encompassing feeling of desolation or annihilation, when the social gaze (whether real or internalized) sizes up and impugns who one is, when one’s self is reckoned and found wanting. To borrow a metaphor from Emmanuel Levinas, such shame occurs when the often aggressive glare of the social world (again, whether in the social field itself or introjected) apprehends a person as riveted to a form of being that that person wishes, often desperately, to disavow, deny, evade or escape (Levinas, 2003). Forged in the experience of exposure and of social deficiency, such shame registers that the fantasy version of selfhood that one identifies with manifests damaged or impaired social viability for as long as the negative exposure lasts.

This account of shame, however, is not universally true. Rather, it identifies how shame appears in its modern incarnation. Though shame in all periods may begin in a similar early interpersonal dynamic, that dynamic and its outcome manifest historical contingencies and differences. The precise shape of that dynamic depends on the ideology and material structure of the family and early child care, for example, that operates in a given cultural moment. Additionally, shame, as it develops from historically specific dynamics of early childhood interaction, takes form and structure through further historically specific social processes, which permeate and shape not only emotion but also constructions of identity and their relation to the social surround.

**SHAME IN HISTORY: A SKETCH**

Before proceeding, however, to an account of the burgeoning postmodern experience and performance of shame, I would like to first provide an abbreviated sketch of modern shame and its sociohistorical genealogy. To begin, in shame’s dominant modern materializations, one phenomenon that needs to be explained historically is why shame was typically produced to excess; that is, why, during modernity, was there an
unfortunate social inclination to produce what I would call “superfluous shame.” Superfluous shame is shame that derives from fairly rigid socially driven paradigms of belonging that have little to do with social function (using a woman’s degree of thinness as a synecdoche for her social value and policing this with forms of shaming for non-compliance would be an example in the last thirty or so years). Such superfluous shame imagines that one exists in a national or global community whose standards and paradigms, propagated by widely disseminated patterns of images, are determinative of whom one is or ought to be.

This propagation of superfluous shame was a residual effect of a collective nostalgia for earlier forms of community that had begun to disappear as the shift from agrarian to mercantile and then to capitalist economies in Europe transformed the character of social relations. Following this, the networks of tight community bonds and affiliations that defined agrarian and early mercantile village life weakened and thinned and instead created stronger bonds of deep intimacy with a select, few persons (the rise of companionate marriage in the upper and middling classes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe is a manifestation of this) as well as occasioning broad but relatively impersonal networks of semi-anonymous contacts with many others.

The rise of contracts as assurances of relational compliance in the place of shame (or of the ritual exchange of gifts) testifies to this transformation (changing the structuring of relations from personal duties to abstract registers and rules of transactive value) (Henaff, 2010, pp. 310, 331-32). This shift was most powerful in more urban areas. In this developing social environment, the nature and role of the self and identity underwent a significant transformation: personal existence began to focus more on the self as a substantive entity largely (and fictively) independent of the social world, as a wellspring of autonomous agency, rather than as a composite of mind, soul and humours whose oneness was, in part, collective, enmeshed more in community and its institutions. Again, this shift was not absolute, and most sectors of the population established selves that manifested both residual and emergent characteristics. Nonetheless, this shift was real and facilitated an intensification of certain effects of shame. Prior to the shift, shame was largely an effect of deficiencies of a person’s communal and/or institutional compliance and performance. Shame was typically generated when one behaved or thought in ways that evinced a separation from communal belonging. But the resultant shame appears to have been less intense than later versions, for it was less about one’s core being or identity (which didn’t really exist) and more about one’s social performance or position, which could be either remediated by social compliance or ignored by further social transgression. An exception to this might be cultures of honor, in which one’s reputation according to an honor code carried a symbolic value more compelling than one’s life. Nonetheless, in most situations there was intense shame-induced pressure to comply with communal and social institutions, but because the self was experienced and thought as a composite, as an aggregation rather than as a unity, shame wasn’t predominantly annihilatory.

This changed in the modern period, at least in the urban West. Increasingly, as the self began to function psychically as a substantializing presence, fashioning identity as an individuated possession, the effects of shame became more intense and annihilating. Though shame remained a social emotion, it did so as the affect that connected the emergent, enhanced, intensified self to social judgment. In doing so, it rendered the
fiction of the modern self’s purported autonomy, its supposed independence from the 
social world moot, and instead submitted the fantasy of the autonomous free self to the 
traumatic, aggressive scrutiny of the social field (which is not precisely the community, 
as community involves people connected by proximity and social bonds while the social 
field is the totality of social structures and interactions in a given domain). And the 
shame that this social gaze had the power to produce could desolate or annihilate the 
self. Because the self had been aggrandized and had taken on a more central role in 
determining and anchoring who one was, its demolition by a sense of an aggressive 
social gaze and attendant feelings of shame was unbearable. In the modern period, 
shame was at once disavowed yet toxically present. Shame haunted and harrowed the 
supposedly independent self, undercutting the myth of its autonomy from the social 
world. And in its intensity, shame provided the disciplinary apparatus to bind the 
nascent bourgeois self to the dictates of the social world.

What this sketch outlines is that any instantiation of shame is an historical process, 
the effect of particular material and sociosymbolic conditions, and that it changes as the 
social world undergoes reconfiguration via social and material processes of change. 
Though shame as a feeling of affect may have some basis in specific neural or brain 
networks, its manifestation responds to and materializes the sociohistorical fashioning 
of those networks, both neurologically by such phenomena as the developmental 
pruning or enhancing of synaptic connections and dendritic arbors, and more 
significantly by the social composing of precisely what arouses shame, what is actually 
felt as shame, how it registers both as a feeling and as behavior, and how it responds to 
the social surround. As a consequence, shame in the present moment of writing, at the 
tail end of 2011, in our postmodern condition in Europe and America, is not the quite 
the same as it was during most of modernity.

Postmodern shame is different from earlier forms, first of all, because the structures 
of the self and identity have changed. Whereas the modernist version of self and identity 
depended on a strongly reified union of consciousness, personality, and 
autobiographical memory and narrative, all tied to a durable essence without qualities 
(Ophir, 2005, p. 66), postmodern selfhood seems to be less clearly constructed as an 
“internal” or essentially psychic structure, but rather seems to exist predominantly in the 
production of self-effects. It is performative, serial, virtual and simulative rather than 
something that has been hypostatized as the anchoring substance of one’s social and 
psychic being. Though Jacob Rogozinski has recently argued against postmodern 
orthodoxy by suggesting that whatever we are, it is predicated on some sense of having 
an ego, a me (2010, p. 6-8), such an ego is not prior to or independent of the forces of 
social creation. As Judith Butler has argued persuasively for gender, behavior and 
identity is performative rather than substantive (2004, pp. 902-903). It follows that as 
social media such as Facebook, Linked in, YouTube, Twitter, etc., facilitate new ways 
to structure selfhood, to be oneself, effacing or at least reconfiguring the modernist 
division between internal and external, and between public and private, self-effects and 
selving seem to be displacing to some degree, the modernist dependency on the 
possession of a durable identity predicated on the self. Of course, the reified fantasy of 
self has not entirely disappeared. To use the terms of Raymond Williams, the 
hypostatized or entified self endures as a residual phenomenon, a remnant of the 
modernist historical subject that has not yet vanished. And the new postmodern self, the 
manifestation of serial self-effects, is emergent, a mode of being that is becoming more 
POSTMODERN SHAME

What this means in terms of postmodern shame is threefold. First, shame now occurs in a space of restricted but open performativity (I am what I become and perform, and it could and will be otherwise). Because the reified self has given way to flexible, performed singularity, shame is not quite as damaging to the person shamed, for as the self becomes more changeable and fluid, so too does shame, being tied to failed or tainted self-effects rather than a tightly held but now deprecated or damaged identity. It is as if the ego has undergone a narcissistic expansion or amplification, while simultaneously becoming more fluid, operating more as a mobile, flexible effect of performance than as a root source of identity or as a vigilantly defended nuclear core. These shifts allow one to remain at least partially open to the other even in the moment of shame, since self-effects rather than the self as such are at stake, making the experience of shame itself less toxic and desolating. This lessening of the adverse impact of shame enables a lingering openness to tempered forms of alterity that the modernist experience of shame typically quashed. Second, postmodern shame induces neither a stringent experience of emotional recession nor of withdrawal. Rather, because the postmodern self is already in some ways dis-integrated, that is, dispersed into multiple, serial, often overlapping performances and sociopsychic spaces, shame becomes less ego-dystonic (as the ego itself is less precisely and uncompromisingly consolidated). As a consequence, shame can become, paradoxically, a provocation to desire and to action—specifically, a desire for new or recuperated self-effects and acts that attempt new self-construction. Shame thus can generate an intensified inclination to create, consume and display self-effects, spurring the return to a virtual social space in which self and identity are external, serial, open to proliferation and yet predominantly of one’s own making. Postmodern shame then can drive active selving rather than the truncation of self-performance that typically attends modern shame. Third, postmodern shame motivates a kind of non-temporal nostalgia, a longing for a future (or, perhaps, better, a beguiling self-effect in that future) that never will be, but which displaces the deficiency and the inadequacies of self-effects in the present as well as those of the autobiographical self and the past as such. One might think of the function of avatars in this light or of the intensified tendency in postmodern life to think of the future as a dreamscape of potential self-production. Such shame-provoked nostalgia, however, is not simply a yearning for a daydream version of the modern self, reified and perdurable, but rather manifests a longing for a return to a version of subject experience that would not be predominantly serial or virtual, a longing for a self-effect that would allow restive postmodern singularity the residual solace of a momentary, refreshing apprehension of durable, even if transient and performative, composure.

Postmodern shame offers a less toxic, unbearable experience than does its modern precursor because it occurs in relation to new possibilities for self or, perhaps better, ego defense. In the discourses of modernity as typified by Freud, the ego/self protects itself by thickening its imaginary boundaries, by deploying repression to prevent its penetration or decompose by unwanted stimuli (whether of libido, the id’s aggression, or the social world). One could suggest, for Freud, that shame was one way of experiencing intensely aversive ego-penetration. In this line of analysis, shame is the feeling of the ego being violated by that which it needs to repress or keep exterior. According to this logic, what is exposed in shame is that at least one of the
differentiations on which the ego is based (ego vs. id, ego vs. superego ego vs. perception, ego vs. other) has begun to collapse and that a more fundamental, constitutive difference between what is “inside” the ego and what is “outside” it has also been shattered or profoundly sabotaged. The unbearability of modern shame is the unbearability of an ego that constitutes itself by expelling what it wishes to disavow having to feel, in spite of its own animosity and dread for what has been disavowed, that the disavowed has penetrated its defenses and has become (or remains) part of its being. The pain of modern shame might be construed as the pain of a breached or perforated ego.

In contrast, the postmodern ego is not similarly invested in the absolute preservation of ego-boundaries. The postmodern world, rather than abetting the defensive reinforcement of ego-individuation that typically occurs in and through childhood development in the bourgeois family, undercuts that version of the subject by providing extensive mechanisms for the extension of ego beyond the bodily self (both the corporeal self and the imaginary self). In the postmodern world, the ego may not be, as in Lacan, using representations from the world as prosthetics to constitute a composed self, but rather projecting itself into the world as image, as voice, as text, in order to expand what it is or might be. Rather than seeing ego-boundaries as requiring defensive vigilance and preservation, the postmodern ego may construe ego-boundaries as merely provisional limits that can be stretched, extended, permeated, reconstructed, and reimagined. And because these boundaries can be stretched or reimagined in multiple directions and can serve multiple aims and desires, the ego no longer has a nuclear “place” in the psyche; the very metaphors of ego as entity, agency or place become inadequate, for ego becomes less a defensive executor and more a virtual aggregate. If ego exists, it does so more thinly—in multiple forms, condensations and incorporations of agency and desire. And in this sense, “ego” becomes significantly less vulnerable to intrusions by what might be “external” to it. Because it is not based primarily on forms of disavowal or repression or vigilantly defended boundaries, it is not so liable to the aversive possibilities of penetration by ego-dystonic forces, whether affective or representational. More permeable and fluid than Freud’s version, the postmodern ego cannot be so easily desolated by shame, as it has more avenues to reconstruction if it has been breached (many of them fully external to itself) and the experience of breach itself is not as dystonic or destructive. As ego becomes more and more a virtual projection rather than a precipitate of the imaginary body, it becomes less trenchantly liable to any dominant social gaze and the kind of shame that that gaze generates. If that gaze seeks to breach my ego, so what, I can find my ego and supports for it elsewhere.

NEW MANIFESTATIONS

The postmodern version of shame has increasingly come to supplant its modern precursor. And this shift is, to reiterate, an effect of emergent transformations in persons’ experience and the social construction of self in the postmodern world. Because shame in our contemporary postmodern moment has become more open to alterity, less ego-dystonic and more nostalgic than annihilatory (all effects of the waning of the modern self that had helped compose and substantiate individual, autonomous, foundational identity), it has also become more tolerable, less a means of self-obliteration than a spur to proliferate compensatory self-effects (often through self-projections of various kinds). Shame now generates, paradoxically, not simply a need to
evade exposure or to cover the nakedness of one’s socially deficient being, but rather often a desire to display oneself more, to perform more, to camouflage potential self-deficit by serial self-presentation. If the work of the American sociologist Erving Goffman (1986) on the microdynamics of interaction rituals captured the fear of stigmatizing exposure and shame that haunted modernity, it is perhaps Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* (2005) that adumbrates the new dynamic of shame: that it is has become as much generative and productive as inhibitory and desolating. One might consider here the phenomenon of political apology, which increasingly has become a productive construction of self or nation rather than an abject recognition of an untenable dereliction of core identity formations or values. Such apology seems more about self-transformation rather than an admission of some kind of desolating shame.

One reason for this change is that not only has the self been transformed by postmodernism; the other has been transformed as well. This has occurred partially because technology has facilitated a partial displacement of the other as other. While one is exposed to more radical forms of alterity in postmodernism than previously—one has access on the web and through the media to cultures and peoples far removed from oneself—technology has also provided a mediation of that alterity or otherwise, rendering it less immediately threatening or antagonistic. One reason for this is that the other, especially the radical other, becomes less and less a participant in one’s personal struggle for recognition. One views the other, perhaps even consumes the other (as digitalized and to some degree commodified), but one doesn’t engage with or really confront the other’s otherness. If there is contact, it is predominantly composed through the fiction of similarity generated by virtual contact itself with its attendant sense of control (and self-control). It is more an interface than an encounter. Additionally, if I visit a Muslim or transgender chat room, I can be either Muslim or transgendered or both. I can control the degree of otherness between my self and the other. As a consequence, the other becomes (or perhaps more accurately, always can become) a momentary, *virtualized* focal point for my gaze, able to be scrutinized and largely contained within the representational matrices that current global technology manufactures. Consequently, the radical other, the other who hasn’t been construed as essentially similar, functions merely as background or as a fantasy source of fear, rather like the bogey in a horror film. It is an other whom I see, whom I gaze at, but whom I never engage with, talk to or confront. This means that in spite of my perception of the radical other, or even of more proximal others, rather than trying to find my self in the refractory, turbid mirror of that other, I can find other ways to construct who I am.

One of the major symptomatic ways of doing this in the postmodern world is through the lens of what used to be called a camera, but which now includes all the devices that facilitate the recording and dissemination of images, texts and other kinds of representations and simulations. In effect, the camera, the recording device, the text, the voice on Twitter, etc., not the other as other, have come to function as the central structuring aspect of one’s social mirror, a shift that allows a person to compose herself before and within a self-instantiating technological matrix. In the mirroring I of the digital world, I can improvise my self as an endlessly mutable series of self-effects and post them to Facebook or YouTube or any of the endlessly proliferating places on the web where selfhood is only, celebratively, performance. In effect, I need less and less of the other as other to recognize my self. The result is that in the virtual speculum of
postmodern social technology and media, shame has become increasingly momentary, ephemeral, something that does not insistently stick to one’s being because one’s being is continually re-composing itself in differing performances, offering itself anew to the other, but only as a momentary possibility of who I am, as a performance, not as a manifestation of identity. If I don’t like who I am perceived to be in the social mirror, I can post a new self, with new images, new words. I can be something or someone else. To a large extent, thereby, I can evade the residual, desolating forms of shame.

SHAME AS PRODUCTIVE

This change doesn’t mean, however, that shame is simply vanishing. Instead, much of the activity of self-performance that characterizes postmodern culture in the West can be viewed as a kind of reactive response to shame, a response to the potential loss of face or socially competent being in the eyes of the other. This self-performative response, however, does not stem from the residual forms of shame that cleave to the core of one’s being and desolate it, but rather to the emergent shame that burdens one’s self-recognizing, self-mirroring performances. The penchant for self-display (whether verbal, visual, or both) that occurs in our contemporary world manifests just how much postmodern personhood remains tethered to a social world that passes judgments, and this is so even if a person experiences herself more as a series of self-effects than as an autonomous self. There is, in postmodern self-display, a hunger to be seen, to be recognized. The self still needs to be seen, even if only virtually, though what is seen is largely of one’s own making. One has more control of one’s virtual self than one does of one’s material self, and as the former supplants the latter in terms of social manifestation, this control allows the mobility of self that thins out the experience of shame. One can still feel the trauma of being defective, and the residual types of shame that make that experience toxic still persist, but a person often redresses these feelings now by a calibrated exposure to the social world, or, more precisely, by exposure to and within the virtual social world, wherein technology facilitates the production and distribution of self-effects. Shame is perhaps more ubiquitous now than it has ever been, but also more ephemeral, more open to evasion. Thomas Scheff has written about the problems of what he has called “bypassed shame” (1990, p. 87); in the postmodern world, however, one may perhaps talk more accurately of evaded shame, of a social dynamic in which the feeling of shame is averted by an increase and enhancement of exposure, in which one creates oneself as detachable self-effects that can be modified or discarded in order to stay ahead of shame and the aggressive social gaze that continues to generate it. This matrix of shame isn’t strictly inhibitory or disciplinary; it is productive.

We live in a world in which this productive materialization of shame is becoming more and more dominant. What this registers, as I have said, is a changing relation between the subject, the self, the “ego,” and the social field. What it also registers is an historical structuring of psyche that apprehends in the multiple mirrors that technology offers a way of mediating and camouflaging the power of the other. But this new postmodern productive version of shame is not simply positive; there remains a nostalgic longing for a future self that is more than a series of self-effects. Within this nostalgia, there is an implicit longing for the other, for a mirror that in its difference can do a bit more than generate serial self-effects. And it is that longing that conserves
shame as an emotion of social attachment and connection, which remains ever so necessary in our bloody, alienated times.

REFERENCES


Chapter 6

On the interaction between implicit and explicit strategies for behavior

René van Hezewijk

Open University of the Netherlands

SUMMARY

Psychologists point out that much human behavior complies with implicit—or automatic, unconscious, involuntary, unintentional—rules. However, the profession has prospered by embracing counseling and other kinds of intervention as if human actions are rational, intentional and voluntary. Moreover, most people will report strong convictions about the conscious decisions they make to act in certain ways. This paper’s focus is on the way psychologists deal with explicit and implicit strategies. Four ways of dealing with this issue are suggested, organized along two dimensions: objective-subjective, and implicit-explicit. These strategies can be found in the history of psychology, though some were more popular than others. One of these is discussed more elaborately: objective x implicit. A way out of resulting paradoxes is suggested. It is important to look at the way explicit and implicit strategies interact in the actual production of actions.

INTRODUCTION

Psychology offers a range of perspectives on individuals either as the apparent victim of automatic acts, or as the apparent perpetrator of willful, self-determined action. Many psychologists emphasize how much of human behavior complies with implicit—or automatic, unconscious, involuntary, unintentional—rules. For example, Greenwald and Banaji (1995) suggest that “the terms implicit-explicit capture a set of overlapping distinctions that are sometimes labeled as unaware-aware, unconscious-conscious, intuitive-analytic, direct-indirect, procedural-declarative, and automatic-controlled. …that is, it is unavailable to self-report or introspection” (p. 4).

Nevertheless, psychology has prospered by embracing counseling and other kinds of intervention in personal affairs as well as organizational contexts (e.g., Brown & Lent, 2008). Many of the interventions presume the rationality of an individual’s actions, despite their limited success (e.g., Berg & Høie, 2010; Peng, Huang, Chen, & Lu, 2009). Moreover, most people will report strong convictions about the conscious decisions they make to act in certain ways. They intend to do an annual health checkup whether this is “expressive of our inner lives,” or “constitutive of them” (Larrain & Haye, 2012, p. 17). However, daily experience is neither sufficient as evidence (Wegner, 1994, 2002) nor conclusive as counter-evidence (Bertelsen, 2012). In sum, the paradox is that human behavior is governed by laws yet volitional (e.g., Gigerenzer, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2004; Wegner, 2002).

So one fundamental question is whether human actions are governed by explicit strategies or by implicit strategies for behavior.
Objective—Subjective

Another duality still haunting psychology is related to the fundamental question posed above. It concerns objectivity versus subjectivity. I refer to the opposing elements of the role of psychologists in their interaction with their subjects. When the phenomena which psychologists deal with can be easily verified they can be said to be objective. “Objective” is often considered to be a synonym for “correct.” The use of the word here, in its true sense, is intended to be as accommodating as possible for the way in which the psychologist aims at knowledge that is verifiable by others, and which does not rely on his own opinion. So, the psychologist is outside the picture, like Atlas who allegedly carried the world. This position contrasts with the one where the psychologist refers to implicit knowledge and shared experiences. In this approach—the subjective approach—we see psychologists claiming that there cannot be any understanding of another person’s actions if they, as individuals, do not understand and are not part of the context or culture within which the person normally operates, his history, his future prospects, etc. A psychologist, as a human being, must therefore be included in the picture if there is to be an interaction with a subject (which is obviously necessary). “Verstehen”—understanding—used to be the relevant term in some circles. So things are said to be relative to a person, are interwoven with what a person knows from his own experience, or says about the things as he sees them. The psychologist is included in this view. He is in the picture, part of his subject’s world.

HOW THE PARADOX WAS DEALT WITH

One way to deal with the paradox is to discard one of these views and retreat to commitment to the other. Take, for example, the Psychology of Consciousness (Bewusstseinspsychologie) of Wilhelm Wundt and the Würzburg School who—whatever their differences—became the “natural” antagonists of behaviorists such as Watson, Skinner and Hull—whatever their differences. Or earlier, between the behaviorists and the cognitive psychologists (Chomsky, etc.). And it happens between the protagonists of neurocognition and their antagonists of enactivism, or in the mutual ignoring of genetic and evolutionary psychology.

This is also what happens when a psychologist seems to have changed sides. For instance, in the 1950s Hans Linschoten was considered to be a phenomenologist and a member of the Utrecht School, led by Frederik J. Buijtenhuijs (Linschoten, 1961, 1963, 1968, 1971). Allegedly, he changed to positivism, according to his most recent book (Linschoten, 1964). Linschoten finished the manuscript but died in 1964, before his book was published. His book became very popular with a generation of younger psychologists, who read the book as arguing for reductionism, and as being critical of phenomenology, common sense, Freud, experimental artifacts, imagined inner worlds, and other mythomagical procedures (language included) (Van Hezewijk & Stam, 2008). Basically, however, his position is that psychologists are as vulnerable to idola as other human beings. They use simple heuristics: reconstruct a cognitive viewpoint, a possible theory, as a standpoint in opposition to another standpoint. This approach is at least as old as Hegel, if not Heraclites. And psychologists are still doing this.

So we have two approaches: the first seems to be about the person, the second about the psychologist. At first sight the core of both is easy to recognize: the phenomenological and the empirical-analytical. What about combinations of the two?
Enactivism seems the most outspoken theory in which the subjective and the implicit are combined. On the one hand the observer/psychologist is included in the picture as a necessarily understanding partner in social relationships. On the other hand is a position in which the aim is to explain actions by not referring to rational behavior (as most people do), but by instead referring to embodied or consensually coordinated, situated action (Baerveldt & Verheggen, 1999, 2012; Lakoff, 2004, 2008; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999; Maturana & Varela, 1987; Verheggen & Baerveldt, 2001, 2012). For instance, Baerveldt and Verheggen (1999) summarize enactivism as follows:

Whereas people believe they act on the basis of their own authentic experience, cultural psychologists observe their behavior to be socially patterned. It is argued that, in order to account for those patterns, cultural psychology should take human experience as its analytical starting point. Nevertheless, there is a tendency within cultural psychology to either neglect human experience, by focusing exclusively on discourse, or to consider the structure of this experience to originate in an already produced cultural order. (p. 183)

A fourth way to deal with this could be named Socratic psychology. By Socratic psychology I refer to the types of counseling and therapy in which the client and psychologist enter into a dialogue to articulate the reasons for actions, and/or the instructions for further actions.

Thus, the table suggests that there are four alternative ways of dealing with the paradoxes. This paper’s focus is on the theoretical approaches in the Implicit x Objective cell.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE PERSON</th>
<th>Implicit persons are unable to fully illuminate and express the influences on their actions</th>
<th>Explicit persons believe that they can and should explain their own behavior or actions as text, as rule driven, law like, rational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THE PSYCHOLOGIST</td>
<td>Objective aims at knowledge verifiable by anybody, psychologist “outside” the picture</td>
<td>Empirical-analytical psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Husserl, James, Bühler, Brunswik, Gibson, Zajonc, Wegner, Gigerenzer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective psychologist includes/should include self in the picture, verifiable/verified by any other “understanding” psychologist</td>
<td>Phenomenological psychology Enactment theory</td>
<td>“Socratic” psychology Narrative psychology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Husserl**

Husserl has often been misunderstood in his aims. Briefly, Husserl intended to find the most basic foundation of science. He suggested the answer was to find the ultimate categories in which we can think about the world. He called it phenomenology. In his early career, Husserl considered phenomenology and descriptive psychology to be one and the same. What Husserl meant by “descriptive psychology” was the systematic description of the different aspects of life—actions, experiences, thinking, perception,
feeling, etc. Once these were established we could understand for example why physics is what it is: a refining of the categories by which humans act and relate to the world. In later works Husserl contined to think about his relation, concluding that phenomena had to be seen as a necessary preparation for the pure and proper questions of psychology. You have to go through psychology in order to be able to do psychology. However, this is not the only route. Another exists: a psychology that develops in a phenomenological way. This is an “aprioristic psychology”: a psychology that investigates the most fundamental ways of thinking, perception, feeling etc. which makes all science possible, including psycholgy. In other words, for Husserl psychology became the very science that could investigate and make explicit those presuppositions about the world that every scientist has, even before he starts doing science. This includes psycholgy. Just like physical nature, human behavior can be illuminated without the presupposition of an omniscient actor. A way to do that is by bracketing, so as to aim for objectivity by getting oneself out of the picture. However, this is not so much a methodological demand as a psychological mission, if not challenge.

Another important way to approach the basic question is to aim for reduction. Eidetic reduction is to get to the essence of things and relationships by leaving everything out that does not add to a clear view of the essence of the thing. Reduction in the phenomenological sense aims at the reflected mindful experience (seelische Erfahrung) everyone inevitably must have, the reflection on someone’s relation (not “your own relation”) with the outer world captured in the essence of things. It is not about reduction in the physical/empirical sense using logic, mathematics and statistics, to boil down to the right “causal” variables. The aim is to find the types of conscious experience, their typology, not their varieties.

Karl Bühler

Karl Bühler (1879-1963) did his best work in Vienna. He is one of the few psychologists who had an eye for the way psychology has to deal with opposing schools of thought. He was the most important member of the Würzburg School (with Oswald Külpe). Later, in Vienna, he was the university teacher of Karl Poppel, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Egon Brunswik, Paul Lazarsfeld, Konrad Lorenz, among others. Imageless thought, mental set, the Aha! moment, and function pleasure are concepts he suggested which are still used in psychology and common sense.

The approach he suggested in his Krise der Psychologie is still relevant (Bühler, 1927). Psychology was in a “developmental crisis” in the 1920s. Rivaling schools led to an embarras du choix—an abundance of choices. In his time the behaviorists (Watson and others), the followers of the psychology of consciousness (Wundt and many others), and the phenomenologists were the main antagonists. Bühler felt that it is not a matter of choice between any of these systems of psychology, excluding the others. He believed they represented different approaches to three aspects of being human:

- functional behavior (Benennen) as it can also be objectively observed in animals
- subjective experiences (Erlebnisse) we suppose any other person to have
- “correlations with the buildings of the objective mind” (Korrelationen mit den Gebilden des objektiven Geistes), that is, the products of the human mind solidified in books, art, instruments, utensils, etc.

If we want only one psychology, we have to find the way experience relates to behavior, how experience relates to the objective mind, and how behavior relates to the objective
mind. We should not think of these as different levels that only need to be reduced to each other. The question is how these aspects interact.

Note that Bühler was very serious about this objective mind. The idea was that for instance language, art, mathematics, logic, value systems, culture, rituals and other consensually coordinated actions can be found in the objects (Gegenstände) and buildings (Gebilde) of the mind. They have significance far beyond their literal (physical) value. Symbols and symbolic actions need be interpreted before they come to life, but they can be said to exist independently of an interpretation. These are considered best as tools for adaptation to the world, including to the world of others. One of them is language. In his Speech theory (Sprachtheorie) (1934) Bühler developed the Organon model of speech, a more or less functionalistic look at language as an adaptive tool that is stable enough to be characterized as a building that all of us inhabit, rather than as a private language developed for personal expression. Referring to Darwin, Bühler already saw language as an instrument for survival of the species.

Egon Brunswik

An interesting transition between the old psychologists and the newer ones who aimed at one psychology involving or including all aspects is Egon Brunswik (1903-1955). In his The Conceptual Framework of Psychology (1952), Brunswik is concerned with the unity of psychology and its position in the sciences.

On its way to becoming a science, psychology had to face certain requirements of procedural policy or general methodology. The issues involved fall into two major groups. One deals with the rigor of fact-finding, inference, and communication. In this respect, there must be methodological unity of psychology with the other sciences, especially physics. In contemporary psychological discussion this requirement is often expressed by saying that we must make psychology an “objective” or an “operational” discipline in the general manner attempted by behaviorism. (Brunswik, 1952, p. 1)

[...] The basic deficiencies of introspection as a scientific tool become evident, more drastically than in perception, in the efforts to establish a descriptive “phenomenology” of thinking. One of the reasons for this is that the lack of a common external reference situation underscores what is known as the “private” rather than “public” character of introspective observation. Related to this is the so-called “noncommunicability” of introspection. There is hardly an instance in introspective psychology in which the helpless solitude of the observer is as clear as in the studies of the so-called Wurzburg school. (Brunswik, 1952, p. 4)

In other words, on the one hand there is the methodological question of objectivity and rigor that makes psychology a member of the family of sciences. On the other hand there is the question of what Husserl would call its intended object. Where does psychology need to focus on in order to find the best explanations?

For Brunswik psychology aims for objectivity about subjectivity, about the implicit and explicit sensitivities for probable variations and the implicit and explicit strategies for behavior. He has an eye for the role of the psychologist being in the picture but has to acknowledge that as an explaining psychologist he has to stay out of the picture to aim at objectivity.
His lens model illustrates the way he suggested approaching the problem of how psychologists deal with explaining the behavior of human beings, while being human themselves (Wolf, 2005). A person is an organism living in an environment which is uncertain for the individual concerned. This uncertainty for the person is due to the probability relations between the objects out there (the distal stimuli) in a large array of aspects (the field and the context of the object) and the probability function between the distal and the proximal stimulus (what has “hit” the eye, so the retinal image). Additionally, there are the person’s own probability functions regarding the perceived or imagined possible outcomes that they can act on. So the person acts as the lens between stimulus and action. According to Brunswik, psychology will not understand behavior if it only considers rates on the average individual. In a study, samples of individuals from a population will not do. A survey asking for behavior, let alone plans for behavior, will fail. Psychology can only work if as much attention is given to the individual within its environment as is given to the individual itself.

The environment of an organism is uncertain for the organism itself as well as for the “observer,” i.e., the psychologist with his or her biases, or due to errors in measurement. The environment should be approached as fundamentally probabilistic however much it accords to physical laws. Adaptation requires the organism to learn to employ probabilistic means to achieve goals. Psychologists not only need samples of individuals, but also samples of individual reactions to the adaptation problems in the probabilistic world. And they need samples of the main aspects individual organisms tend to select from the vast array of distal stimuli and concentrate into proximal cues, which they then react to. A cue “replaces” the distal object, but there may be many cues replacing the same object, or one cue replacing many objects or aspects of an object. The largest carrot can be chosen by, for example, using the length of the stem or the width of the leaf. Relevant cues for a city can be the degree to which the name sounds familiar: does it have a premier league football club or a university?

The lens model suggests that the individual organism has the ability to select from a heterogeneous environment, with its many different types of cues, the possible aspects that together make adaptation possible. It finds new foci, ignores other cues, and it produces new actions, trying to forget old habits. The distal cues are the things and events out there, the proximal cues are the stimuli on the organisms interface with the world, already indicating, for example, what the senses are aware of. The proximal outputs are the movements of the limbs etc. resulting in molar actions with certain functionality. And in the meantime, it is suggested here that the organism recognizes
affordances, symbols, things that the cues are cues for, as far as they are functional for the individual.

With his work on ecological validity Brunswik had an idea that later entered psychology as a methodological demand of practical applicability. But he originally meant it to be one aid among others in creating a psychology that could better explain the way individual persons (not categories of persons) react to their environment. It has its parallel in the functional validity: “an index for the performance by the organism, showing complete, global extent of how the distal objects match both in the input and output area” (Wolf, 2005, p. 7). It leads to the conclusion that the psychologist aims at objectivity but, for example, in experiments may have to account for his own influence on the subject as well.

HOW THE PARADOX IS DEALT WITH

Above, I have discussed three psychologists from the history of psychology who were involved in the relation between psychology as a science and its object. These theoretical psychologists reflected on its unity or lack of it, its relation to other sciences, its object, and its objectivity. They tried, each in their own way, to make sense of the variety of activities one can find in the psychological journals. More recently, there have been some new contributions. For instance, Robert Zajonc was one of the first since Freud to pay attention to the non-cognitive aspects of human behavior and experience. In his often quoted article Feeling and thinking: Preferences need no inferences (Zajonc, 1980) his argument can be found in the title. Our actions and reactions are there even before we have the time to consider their appropriateness, a theme that reflects William James’ theory of emotions (later known as the James-Lange Theory) (James, 1890).

In his The illusion of conscious will (Wegner, 2002), Daniel Wegner gives strong arguments in favor of the idea that conscious will is not the origin of our behavior. Whether much of our behavior is automatic or not, daily and professional experience suggests that there is room for intentions and interventions. We intend to walk the dog (in a minute or two); we decide to stop smoking (in a year or two). However, in psychology daily experience is not sufficient as evidence. Wegner emphasizes that there is much more to say in favor of the idea that will is the emotion of authorship of behavior, rather than the origin of behavior. Most actions are caused just before the effect, and are followed by the “post-action invention of intention” (Wegner, 2002, passim). The parallel events of thoughts and actions lead to the conclusion that actions are caused by the thoughts. Hence the illusion. Consciousness appears in this view as a lens that not only unconsciously receives the stimuli leading to actions, but also receives the resulting behavior as a stimulus to be interpreted post-hoc as the intention of the action.

Gerd Gigerenzer sees himself as influenced by the work of Brunswik in many respects (Gigerenzer, 2001; Gigerenzer & Kurz, 2001). In his work one finds, for instance, the move from ecological validity towards ecological rationality, the shift from probability functionalism to risk perception, the development from vicarious functioning to heuristics, the adaptive toolbox (cf. Bühler’s Organon Theory), the focus on (re)design of products of the objective mind tuned to the bounded rationality of individuals, and the interest in the history of probability and the way psychologists deal(t) with it. Organisms, not in the least human beings, possess an adaptive “toolbox”
with, for example, the heuristics to distract (or abduct) cues that help decide what the best (satisficing) action is, given time constraints and insufficient information. This tool from the toolbox is Bühler’s “organon.” It is Brunswik’s functional validity and ecological validity translated to the person, who has to reckon with risks (probabilistic functionalism) because we can only depend on our bounded rationality. The (re)design of the cognitive environment (objektiver Geist, World III) is one aspect Gigerenzer has added to the lens model. It reflects the modern interpretation of ecological validity. Apart from that, Gigerenzer is also known for his contributions to the history of (mis)use of statistics in psychology (Gigerenzer, 1989, 2004).

CONCLUSION: HOW THE PARADOX COULD BE DEALT WITH

What connects these views is that they consider psychology to be an autonomous science, but not isolated from other sciences. They consider humans to be a species like any other, but do not conclude that there must be a Darwinian psychology: humans have cognitive, linguistic, technological and affective organs (tools). Moreover they consider human beings to be challenged to adapt to uncertain environments with the outcome of their actions being uncertain. And, last, they consider adaptation as the aim for rationality, not as cognition of physical reality in its logically optimal form.

Psychology should aim at integrating all the aspects that have proven to be interesting, and to show how they interact. After a period of optimistic reductionism it always seems that there is more to know in the areas we are not reducing to, but reducing from. We study behavior, but it is action; we study neural processes, but they generate experiences and feelings with their own access and excesses; we are all individuals, but we cannot live without others; we study cognition as an internal affair, but it is supported by an extended mind.

Moreover, it is clear that there are many implicit strategies for behavior, although we cling to the view that our behavior is governed by explicit, volitional, rational, strategies. We invent post-action, rational reasons for behavior as if they were pre-action intentions, especially when participating in a psychological survey. This implies that it is important to look at the way explicit and implicit strategies interact in the actual production of actions. The lens model might be very helpful in realizing what strategies (heuristics) are used with what distal stimulus arrays and what probable output. Strategies for behavior can best be studied in their relation to the ecology of the individual organism.

What is suggested to be applicable to persons should be applied to the psychologist’s role as well. If persons are often unaware of the stimuli that influence behavior, psychologists in their laboratory or therapeutic environments will have unintended effects on the behavior of clients and participants. In the same way clients and participants in a real-life environment may have unintended influences on psychologists. As psychologists we should be very much aware of the subliminal, social, and other influences on goals and automatic behavior of participants. This includes the stimuli that we as psychologists produce, presupposing that we can be “outside” the picture, yet are unaware of the spurious couplings with the instruments we use, the interpretations of the measurements we have, and especially the behavior of the persons we let participate in experiments. Psychology often looks at the average individual in an average environment. Statistically speaking, as a result of a large sample of interviewees with a multitude of survey questions, conclusions might be
drawn about the “average” individual being influenced by many “determinants” of behavior (each to a certain degree). However, for any individual the array of determinants selected to adapt to may be much smaller (although differing from others) due to the way the “lens” selects from the input variables aiming at the bounded cognitive and other strategies available for the organism, demanding to select the most adapted (ecologically rational) output variables.

**REFERENCES**


Chapter 7

Translating between different frames of reference: A model for the social sciences

Vasi van Deventer

University of South Africa

SUMMARY

Observers are on equal foot when they conduct and share their observations within a universal frame of reference. But the possibility of a universal frame of reference was undermined by 20th century physics, and philosophy followed suit especially during the latter half of that century. That knowledge depends on localised frames of reference became a well established fact and the translation between frames of reference a formalised methodology. The present paper introduces to a non-mathematically minded audience the formal model of translating between different frames of reference (coordinate systems). General language terms are assigned to processes depicted in the model in order to allow it to be imported into the social sciences. A brief explication of the model using an example shows that argumentation in the social sciences are incomplete. The objective results produced by well balanced and logical arguments need to be supplemented by the results of arguments based on inverse translations and by a further level of analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Psychology has been crossing boarders ever since its inception, initially between Germany, England and America, but more recently also between western and traditionally non-western societies. These crossings lead to significant changes in the discipline. But psychology (especially since the second half of the 20th century) also began to cross boarders over and above its cultural crossings. New developments in science and philosophy created new worldviews and psychology followed suit. Ontological and epistemological boarders are now crossed regularly to incorporate within psychology streams of thought that appose its traditional yearning for universal truth (e.g., Goertzen, 2008; Kottler, 1990; Mashegoane, 1998).

In essence the crossing of borders is a matter of changing frames of reference. The translation between different frames of reference, or more precisely different coordinate systems, has been explored extensively in mathematics. When it found essential application in physics it grew from pure mathematical curiosity into something of general importance The aim of the present paper is to introduce the mathematical-physical conceptualisation of translation between coordinate systems to a non-mathematically minded audience and to show how the model constitutes a fundamental guideline for crossing borders in psychology. The mathematical formulation is abstract, but in physics it translates into a question of space and time. It is also in the physical interpretation that the problem presents itself more clearly in terms of the relationship between observers.
THE UNIVERSAL COORDINATES OF SPACE AND TIME

Space and time are the basic dimensions we use to reference our experiences. We think of things occupying particular positions at particular times. In space objects have three degrees of freedom (left-right, forward-backward and up-down), and one in time (forward-backward). For us space and time are fundamentally different because space is reversible (an object can move off but then return to its original position) whereas time is non-reversible (things move forward in time, without the possibility of returning to the time of departure). But this is an intuitive experience of things. The classical formulations of Physics treat time as reversible. A formulation describing a process running forward in time can also be used to describe the process going backward simply by reversing the time dimension. This result is important. It represents the world as an infinitely large arena with things existing everywhere and all the time. It offers a perspective that liberates us from the temporality of time, from being stuck in a position where we are able to consider the past but not the future. Time, although separate from space, is like space. It is a forth dimension along which things can be positioned (that is, “spaced”).

Our ability to “space” things is intuitive and mostly taken for granted. Even formal geometrical formulations do not raise the question of the point being defined by its position and time (Auyang, 1995). The point is simply assumed to be there, identifiable as such and separable from any other point. Space itself and time itself may be featureless and continuous, but the arena of our experience (contained in space and time) is assumed to be differentiable (in terms of space and time) because the world we see consists of different things. It is not a featureless plain stretching away into infinity and eternity.

SPECIAL RELATIVITY

The approach described above does not question the matter of observation. The point marked by space and time is simply there, and any observer who cares to look will find the point at its particular position and at its particular time. Therefore, if two observers differ about the point’s position and/or time it is because their observations are not sufficiently accurate.

But the theory of special relativity offers a different perspective. Two observers may produce different observations despite being equally and sufficiently accurate. This happens because special relativity links space and time into a single entity called space-time. Space-time is like a rubbery substance unlike the rigid grid of space and time offered by the classical approach. If space-time is “stretched” in a “space” direction it shrinks in the “time” direction, and vice versa. The idea is difficult to grasp. Expansion and shrinking of space-time is not merely a matter of the measurements (i.e., meters and seconds) being increased or decreased. It is space itself and time itself and therefore everything in space-time (including the measuring instruments themselves) that expand or shrink. From any observer’s point of view things look pretty normal but differences become apparent when one observer considers another observer’s point of view. Fortunately expansion and contraction in space-time take place in an orderly manner. Therefore the differences between different frames of reference are consistent and predictable and one observer’s space-time observation can be translated into the observation made by another.
One can express this in a slightly different but complementary manner, namely that some aspect of space-time is left invariant in the translation from one frame of reference to another. In this context the notion of invariance is equivalent to the notion of symmetry. Two frames of reference are symmetrical of the translation of the one into the other leaves some aspect of the referent (the thing that is referenced) invariant. The same idea is expressed more generally and technically more accurately as follows: The referent is symmetrical under the operation that translates one frame of reference into another if it remains invariant under the transformation (Auyang, 1995).

**GENERAL RELATIVITY**

Without analysing this too deeply one can already sense a significant difference between the referent in the classical system and the referent in special relativity. The referent of the classical system is a given and is universally objective. But the referent in special relativity is objective only in so far as it remains invariant under particular representations of the referent. The coordinates of space and time are still universal in special relativity but they are intrinsically combined to constitute space-time as a unitary entity. Observations that are separated in space-time (that is, made from different frames of reference) have different “mixtures” of space and time. This quite literally means that if an observer (A) is accelerated relative to another (B) B will see A’s space shrink and A’s time expand relative his/her (B’s) own space and time. These changes are not due to the measurements of space and time. It is space itself (and everything in it) and time itself (and all durations it contains) that shrinks and expands. The translations between different frames of reference are about redefining the ratios between space and time.

This counterintuitive understanding of our world is complicated further by general relativity. General relativity abandons the idea that the coordinates of space-time constitute a universal frame of reference. Space-time ceases to be a featureless container of the phenomena we experience. It becomes part of the action. Metaphorically speaking, if in special relativity space-time was the stage that contained the play, it became the décor of the play in general relativity. The space-time of general relativity buckles and curves and these undulations constitute physical features of the world.

This creates a significant problem. We cannot fuse (and thus confuse) our frames of reference with the world they refer to. We need the dimensions of our frames of reference to be featureless in order to produce uncontaminated identifications and differentiations of the world we see.

The solution to this problem is quite drastic. We have to abandon the possibility of a universal frame reference in favour of localised frames of reference, and we have to find a way to combine these localised frames of reference to produce a coherent understanding of the world. The process begins with an assumption. We have to assume that any referent (e.g., a point) in a curved space-time (in other words a space-time that is not flat and featureless) has a region surrounding it (however small this may be) within which space-time appears flat and featureless because the region is too small to contain an indication of the curvature. In other words, we assume that any referent can be framed locally. The curvature of space-time only shows up when we try to combine the local frames of reference. We cannot see the curvature at any particular referent but it becomes apparent when we move from one referent to the next. To be more precise: We cannot see the curvature in a local frame of reference but we can trace it by moving
from one local frame of reference to the next. If space-time is flat (without curvature) the frames of reference stay in the same plane. But if space-time is curved the frames of reference do not stay in the same plane. They rotate relative to each other. The degree of difference (rotation) between the local frames of reference is an indication of the amount of curvature.

In the case of flat space-time (space-time without curvature) there is no difference between the local frames of reference and therefore these frames of reference can be translated into each other using the formulations of special relativity. The situation is more complicated when space-time has curvature and the frames of reference are rotated relative to each other. In this case translations between frames of reference produce differences that cannot be accounted for by the formulations of special relativity. But there is a further complication. The connection between two frames depends on how one moves from one frame of reference to the next. In other words, the degree of difference (rotation) between two local frames of reference depends on the path along which one moves from the one to the other. A different path along the curvature provides a different connection. The true connection or real path between two local frames of reference is the average of all possible paths between them. This corresponds to the shortest path, the connection that requires the least amount of energy to move from the one to the other.

The mathematical procedures required to determine the curvature (the invariant in the translations between localised frames of reference) require a more refined conceptualisation (see Auyang, 1995; Penrose, 2005) than the one presented here, but the aim of the present discussion is merely to provide a general indication of what it means to translate between localised frames of reference.

**INVARiance AND THE TRANSLATION OF LOCALISED FRAMES OF REFERENCE**

If two space-time referents are chosen such that their local regions partly overlap then any referent identified within the overlapping region has two frames of reference. If the referent from the overlapping region shows invariance when the one frame of reference is translated into the other the translation constitutes a symmetrical operation. The referent gains objective existence under the symmetrical operation. It is not bound by a particular frame of reference (it is frame of reference free) because the transformations ensure that the coordinates can be completely suppressed (Auyang, 1995).

An example may help to clarify this. Imagine a spherical object like a ball, placed inside a box with a small hole in each side. Each hole I peep through constitutes a different frame of reference, but each hole offers a similar image. The ball in the box (the referent) is invariant under the transformations of my frames of reference and I have reason to suspect that the thing inside has an existence of its own independent of my perspective thereof. In other words I begin to suspect some form of equivalence between my walking around the box peeping though each hole and the object rotating inside the box with me watching from a single hole. Figure 1 offers a formal description of invariance under symmetrical operations. The formulation may appear complicated to the non-mathematically minded reader, but the processes are fairly obvious if one follows the arrows when reading the explanation.
Suppose X is the referent of two frames of reference, one associated with f(x) and the other with g(x). f is the process whereby X is “framed” within the frame of reference associated with f, and \( f^{-1} \) is the inverse of this process, extracting X from its frame of reference. The same description applies in the case of g. The operation \( gf^{-1} \) (meaning operation g is applied to the result produced by operation \( f^{-1} \)) translates the frame of reference associated with f into the frame of reference associated with g. \( gf^{-1} \) is a symmetry operation if X is invariant under the transformation of f(x) into g(x), or stated the other way round: if \( gf^{-1} \) is a symmetry operation then X will be invariant under the transformation of f(x) into g(x). The same argument holds for \( fg^{-1} \), which preserves X under the transformation of g(x) into f(x) (see Ash & Gross (2006) for an introduction to permutation theory).

**TRANSLATING LOCAL FRAMES OF REFERENCE IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES**

A powerful aspect of the formal model is that it does not commit to a particular ontology. Neither the referent (X) nor the frame of reference (f(x)) is privileged as more fundamental or more real than the other. The invariant is an objective reality independent of a frame of reference, yet simultaneously also merely the invariant preserved by translations between different frames of reference. The models’ ontological impartiality is achieved by balancing the process of framing (e.g., f) with its inverse (e.g., \( f^{-1} \)). It is this aspect of the model that allows one to import it into the social sciences and to use it as a guideline in working with different frames of reference.

The human scientist, more so than other scientists, is confronted with subject matter in which reality and perceptions of reality are fundamentally entangled. The world is perceived and understood in terms of theoretical schemas. The model requires this process to be split into two processes, one constituting the inverse of the other – in general terms we can refer to this as a process of internalisation (e.g., to interpret) and
one of externalisation (e.g., to explain). These labels are arbitrary and certainly subject to change, but they are favoured here to allow the model to be expressed in general language. Therefore, let’s agree to define interpretation as the outcome of a process of making sense, of theorising, and of constructing and incorporating something into a frame of reference, and let explanation be the outcome of the inverse process of explicating, unfolding and realising something as the referent of a frame of reference.

This allows one to read the model as follows:
1. The explanation of an interpretation \( f^{-1} f \) discerns something as some thing (an entity). It establishes an identity between the referent (some thing) and the ontological precedent of the referent (something). It is a symmetrical operation that preserves identity as such (i.e., individuality, uniqueness, distinctness) as the invariant in the translations between some thing and some thing.
2. The interpretation of another’s explanation \( f \circ g^{-1} \text{ or } g \circ f^{-1} \) renders some thing as an objective entity. These translations of one frame of reference into another (i.e., \( f(x) \) into \( g(x) \), or vice versa) are inverse functions establishing an identity between the two frames of reference. They are also symmetrical operations preserving objectivity (i.e., detachment and independence) as the invariant in the translations between the two frames of reference.
3. Something not immediately obvious in the model is that the connection between the frames of reference is path dependent. Thus the objectivity preserved in the translations between frames of reference depends on the particular path taken. We know that the true path, and thus the connection that establishes the invariant (in this case the objective entity) that is really true, is given by the “geodesic,” geometrically speaking the shortest path between two points of reference. In the present context this would mean that translations between frames of reference that are most elegant and least complex are more likely to offer the truth than those that are convoluted and complex.

For example, from a logical positivist frame of reference careful interpretations and explanations enable me to identify and distinguish scientific objectivity as goodness of fit with reality. As a devoted constructionist your explanation of objectivity is consistency in co-constructions. My interpretation of your explanation would involve an evaluation of consistency as a measure of goodness of fit with reality. My interpretation may entail thorough and well balanced arguments producing an understanding that does not depend on positivist or constructivist frames of reference. But it will be an understanding of consistency as a measure of goodness of fit with reality, and not an understanding of goodness of fit with reality as a measure of consistency. Yet, it is normal practice in the social sciences to leave matters at this—in other words, to produce scientifically objective results (in this case a result about scientific objectivity) that tell only half the story. Any attempt to tabulate the other half evokes a contest in which each half fights fiercely for supremacy. But the real invariant, the truly objective result hidden by the interplay between two symmetric translations (in this case the two understandings of scientific objectivity) is the difference between them. Therefore the social scientist should:
1. abandon the belief in a single global frame of reference in favour of local frames of reference (e.g., the idea of only one kind of scientific objectivity should be abandoned)
2. accept the onto-epistemological validity of all local frames of reference (e.g., accept that logical positivist and social constructionist approaches are equally valid)
3. encourage symmetric translations between local frames of reference (e.g., scientific objectivity as consistency in goodness of fit, and scientific objectivity as goodness of it fit in consistency)
4. explore the difference(s) between symmetric translations to provide a formulation that would allow one to be translated into the other.

CONCLUSION

The problem of localised frames of reference appeared in physics at the beginning of the 20th century. Although the solution requires fairly complicated mathematics the underlying model is conceptually easy to comprehend. The general form and main concepts of the model were introduced here, and common language labels were assigned and used to import the model into the social sciences. Although these labels are arbitrary they enable one to see how the model is anchored in basic psychological processes of perception and comprehension. These terms also clarify the model’s ontological neutrality with regard to external reality and perceptions of reality. The emphasis on the inverse relationship between processes of internalisation and those of externalisation allows one to bridge the classical “body-mind” divide and to show how ideas are differentiated and individuated amidst processes of interpretation and explanation, and how objective facts are established in the translations between different frames of reference. The model exposes a major shortcoming in general social science practice, namely that the objective result of it’s logical and unbiased arguments are in fact only half the story—that is, the result depends on the direction of translation between frames of reference. To obtain truly objective results social scientists have to conduct arguments based on the inverse translations between their frames of reference, and they need to add a further level of analysis in which they explore the difference between these inverse translations to identify the invariant that constitute the truth shared by the different frames of reference.

REFERENCES

Chapter 8

Acts of will: Eastern and Western perspectives

Martin E. Morf

University of Windsor, Canada

SUMMARY

The belief that the will can be free of causal encumbrances is presented as Western, modern, unnecessary, pervasive, and divisive. In particular, it divides Western psychology into humanistic and scientific psychology, two distinct disciplines speaking different languages. Kant’s approach to describing and Sappington’s approach to bridging the gap between believers and non-believers in the West are reviewed. Two issues are raised: Whether Kant really believed in free will and whether Sappington’s compatibilism is really a variant of libertarianism. Some Chinese ways of looking at the matter of why we do what we do are examined to see why Eastern cultures seem able to function without relying on the contentious notion of free will. Finally, the status of stances in the West which also seek to avoid postulating free will is evaluated. At least in scientific psychology they appear to be hesitantly rather than strictly determinist. Further examination of cultures which appear to avoid the resulting contradictions is suggested.

FREE WILL AS A CONTENTIOUS AND WESTERN CONSTRUCT

Determinism, Indeterminism, and Libertarianism

The question at issue in this paper is “Why do we do what we do rather than (a) nothing or (b) something else?” A focus on (a) raises the fundamental problem of impetus or motivation, a focus on (b) raises—within the context of impetus or motivation—the more specific issue of choice.

Choice means two quite different things. There are choices whose outcomes are fully determined. Ants and bees, computers and robots are said to make such choices. There are other, more contentious choices whose outcomes are not fully determined. The outcomes of such choices are usually characterized as either “indeterminate” or “underdetermined.” In the first case, the outcome is attributed to chance and we find ourselves in the indeterminate world of small particles and quantum physics. In the second case, the outcome is attributed entirely or in part to “free will” and we find ourselves in the familiar world of everyday events. The dichotomy of interest here is that of fully determined versus underdetermined outcomes.

Free will as a Western and Modern construct

Free will is a construct one might expect few people to endorse because there is no evidence other than widely and deeply held beliefs to suggest there is such a thing. In fact, most cultures seem to get along without it. Consider the case of an Australian Aboriginal woman who accidentally strayed across a sacred site. No one asked about intent or choice, a secret site had been accidentally violated, and she had to be killed
(Strehlow, 1970, p. 114). Consider the rough justice meted out by governmental authorities in many parts of the world. Citizens are executed or jailed indefinitely without apparent consideration whether a deliberate act was committed. An act harmful to the interests of the group or society, as interpreted by the authorities, is often all it takes. In the West, justice hinges usually on choice (intent, deliberation, awareness, responsibility) and on the guilt which follows “bad choices” as night follows day.

But the belief in free will is a sturdy and proliferating plant in the West and perhaps an increasingly popular belief in other parts of the world exposed to global trends emanating from the West. “I can be anything I want to be” is a frequently heard mantra. Oddly enough it is often chanted with the greatest enthusiasm by people who have been roughly handled by fate. Oprah Winfrey preaches the gospel of “you CAN do anything you want to do.” The Wachowski brothers’ Matrix trilogy pits a hardy band of humans, endowed with free will, against the machines that have revolted against humanity and reduced most of it to batteries generating the power the machines need. The remaining humans, pluckily choosing to defend Zion, pin their hopes on “the one,” the “anomaly” Neo. In one scene, an “agent” of the machines asks Neo why he keeps up the hopeless fight, and Neo replies with what must be the most widely applauded tautology ever: “Because I choose to” (e.g., Schick, 2005, p. 79).

Although the construct free will may be uniquely characteristic of the West, it is not necessarily one deeply rooted in Western philosophy. The belief in the human capacity to choose options not dictated by circumstances—external and internal—appears to be a relatively recent idea. Opinions on whether the ancient Greeks thought of the human will as free are divided (e.g., Morf, in press). The evidence suggests that they, like most societies of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, saw themselves at best as small boats tossed about on the sea called fate. Even the will of Zeus was bent by more ancient forces embodied by the moirae, the fates. The Greeks used terms like εκούσιον (hekusion, “the voluntary”) and προαιρέσις (proairesis, “deliberated choice”) in ways which led many modern philosophers to conclude that they did not think that the human will can be “free” (e.g., Robinson, 1989). The Romans were soldiers, administrators, and engineers rather than philosophers, but they are known for their stoicism, a school of thought stressing the futility of railing against fate.

Is Free will unnecessary?

The belief in free will is a two-edged sword. It can have a humanizing influence. It is the basis of Western moral philosophy and justice. “No crime without intent” it is sometimes said; and those—such as the mentally ill—who clearly did not choose freely to commit some heinous act at issue are not found guilty. The belief in free will can also have a harsh and punitive influence: Persons who freely chose to commit a heinous act must expect to pay the price.

Given its humanizing influence and forgetting for the moment its harsh and punitive one, an important question needs to be asked: Is the belief in free will necessary to treat those accused of offending the spirits or the state more humanely than were the Australian Aborigine and the other perpetrators of offenses mentioned earlier? The assumption made here is that it is not. Suppose the judicial system of the West were strictly deterministic and that every act and intention were deemed to be fully determined by antecedent causes. The punishment dimension of Western judicial systems might vanish. What would determine the treatment of a convicted criminal
would be considerations of what needs to be done to maintain social order. Impulsive and violent persons would still be detained; but with the punishment dimension gone, the rehabilitation aspect of the treatment of criminals might become more prominent because it would be less necessary to seek revenge, to follow Old Testament maxims, to gain “closure” by making the evildoer suffer.

**Free will as a pervasive and divisive notion**

The notion of *free will* pervades the West’s popular opinion and its psychology. The public embraces the “be anything” and “can do” mantras of the celebrities shaping popular opinion, fads, and fashions, while even scientific psychologists find it difficult to avoid the language of “underdetermined” choice.

The notion of free will is also divisive, particularly in psychology. Cronbach (1957) famously distinguished between “the two disciplines of scientific psychology,” one correlational, the other experimental. The gap between what are essentially two variants of determinism vanishes when compared to the chasm between determinist scientific and libertarian humanistic psychology. The notion of *free will* splits American psychology into two camps constituting different worlds and speaking different languages (e.g., Morf, 1995). That the American Psychological Association manages to include both of these fundamentally different orientations can only be explained by its size and its structure: It consists of more than 50 Divisions and Societies which can, if they need to, exist without talking to each other.

Scientific psychology strives for objectivity on the ontological plane: It seeks to establish facts in the traditional sense of the term of things and relationships that exist independently of human minds. Humanistic psychology, on the other hand, is ontologically subjective, its truths are experiential, although they carry more weight if they are epistemologically objective, i.e., if reliable reporters confirm each other’s observations or experiences.

This chasm between the scientific and humanistic worlds within psychology suggests a closer look at its antecedents in Western philosophy. It also raises the questions whether the Chinese have managed to get along without the notion of free will and whether they have avoided the contradictions raised by determinism and libertarianism.

**THE WEST'S DETERMINIST AND LIBERTARIAN WORLDS**

**Kant’s two worlds**

Scruton (1994) singles out Kant’s contribution to the idea of human freedom with good reason as “the most important ever made” (p. 234). It is complex and nuanced. It is also that of a philosopher who distinguished clearly between two worlds (Kuehn, 2001; Honderich, 2011). Kant’s first world is the world of knowledge, the determinist world of matter giving rise to phenomena, the world studied by scientists. “Kant did not use any teleological principles to explain nature,” reports Kuehn (2001), “[a]ll that he needed was matter and force. ‘Give me matter, and I will show how the world arose’” (p. 105). Kant’s second world is that of belief, that of noumena. It is opened by the weighty questions we ask about freedom, the existence of God, and our immortality: “Do I have free will?” “Is there a God?” and “Is there life after death?”
Kant’s world of phenomena is not identical with the natural world. The two are related, perhaps closely related, but Kant distinguishes between the natural world and the natural world as perceived by humans. The natural world experienced by humans has been filtered through the modes of perception and the categories of the understanding. But if the natural world is only indirectly accessible, the world of noumena such as “free will” seems even more distant. If we grasp certain aspects of the world of noumena, it is by means of practical reason applied to our feelings and experiences concerned mainly with matters of ethics rather than epistemology and ontology. Durant (1961) sums up this second world opened by the idea of free will as conceived by Kant: “We cannot prove this freedom by theoretical reason, we prove it by feeling it directly in the crisis of moral choice” (p. 210).

Kant’s reluctant case for free will

On the matter of free will, Kant seems to adopt more than one position. There are indications that he saw no way around being a believer in free will, the existence of God, and life after death. However, there are also suggestions that he left it to the individual to (freely) choose whether to be a believer. There are even suggestions that he personally did not feel a need to be one.

Humans clearly are inclined to believe, Kant’s position appears to be, that the human will, though not that of a dog or a lion, can be free. The reason we believe this, he seems to argue oddly enough, is that we have no choice. We have to believe in free will because without it our ideas of individual responsibility, justice, and what constitutes moral behavior would collapse (e.g., Kant, 1959/1785).

There is evidence that Kant at times held deeply-rooted beliefs. Kuehn (2001) reports that he was proud of his name Emanuel/Immanuel (“God is with him”), and that this pride may reflect “a certain optimistic trust in the world as a teleological whole...” (p.26). But Kant’s endorsement of free will seems reluctant and lukewarm, and his view of the world as a “teleological whole” would seem to contradict his other optimistic trust, mentioned above, that given matter, “I will show how the world arose.”

Kuehn (2001) also reports that it "was clear to anyone who knew Kant personally that he had no faith in a personal God. Having postulated God and immortality, he himself did not believe in either. His considered opinion was that such beliefs were just a matter of ‘individual needs.’ Kant himself felt no such need” (p. 3). This assessment suggests that Kant may have been skeptical about the belief in free will as well.

There are additional reasons which might lead one to believe that Kant was not necessarily a believer. First, as a professor at the University of Königsberg, he was a public servant whose ultimate masters were two kings of Prussia, Frederic William II and Frederic II (the Great). Both had strong wills, free or otherwise. Kant also taught at a time when Pietist movements were strong and allies of the king. Preservation of the moral order had high priority, church and state were complexly intertwined, and the dominant religious stances strongly emphasized the human capacity to choose freely between good and evil. From the point of view of the king, this stance must have simplified things: You do evil, you chose to do so, you are “guilty,” you are punished and removed from the scene. Authorities, secular and religious, spared themselves the trouble of exploring causal chains involving states like abject poverty, conditions producing insights conflicting with current orthodoxies, or arbitrary acts by the fortunate, rich, and powerful. Kuehn (2001) makes the point that the belief in free will
was theological doctrine uniformly insisted on in Kant’s time: The philosopher Christian Wolff challenged it and had to decamp hurriedly to Germanic realms more liberal than Prussia.

Second, Durant’s (1961) summary of Kant’s philosophy notes that the poet Heinrich Heine and the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer held the view that Kant gave the people what they needed—the option to believe in free will etc.—without himself espousing it.

Third, there is Kant’s keen interest in, and advanced understanding of, natural history. Not only did he claim, at one point, to rely solely on matter and Laplacian determinism to explain the natural world, he anticipated Charles Darwin. Kant’s *Anthropologie*, published in 1798, suggested the possibility of the animal origin of man and hinted at adaptive changes over time. He argued, for example, “that if the human infant, in early ages when man was still largely at the mercy of wild animals, had cried as loudly upon entering the world as it does now, it would have been...devoured...” (Durant, 1961, p. 199).

**Compatibilism as libertarianism light**

David Hume is another giant of Western philosophy who weighed in on the matter of free will. Where Kant’s arguments are complex and sometimes impenetrable, Hume’s are straightforward: There are two kinds of freedom: the freedom of spontaneity and the freedom of indifference. The first is the freedom from constraints which prevent us from doing what we want to do. The second is the freedom to originate acts. The first exists. The second does not (Hume, 1888/1739-40, pp. 399-412).

For some reason, Hume’s position is qualified as “compatibilist.” He is said to have shown conclusively that determinism and freedom are not mutually exclusive. This overlooks that Hume was a determinist, that he explicitly rejected the freedom to do and choose which libertarians have in mind, and that his freedom from constraint is strictly a matter of circumstance, i.e., of external or internal determinants.

The belief that Hume’s determinism is compatible with libertarian interpretations of freedom is particularly widespread among psychologists. It was expressed by Sappington (1990) in a review article published in the influential *Psychological Bulletin*. Sappington took the position of soft determinism or compatibilism to admit that free will can be a factor in decision-making under certain conditions. These conditions appear to involve self-determinants which cannot immediately and clearly be related to external determinants. Like many other psychologists, Sappington considered Bandura’s “soft-determinist” theory of human agency to be one of various “scientific theories of free will.” He did not distinguish between Bandura’s determinism and the, albeit modest, roles assigned to free will by authors like Sperry (1988) and Rychlak (1981).

However, the view that free will is compatible with determinism is not shared by those who agree with William James who introduced the terms hard and soft determinism. James (1968/1884) maintained that soft determinism is really a mugwump stance adopted by those who want to have their cake and eat it too. Sappington buttressed his case for linking soft determinism and free will with a quote from Hebb: “If my past has shaped me to goof off, and I do goof off despite my secretary’s urging, that’s free will” (Hebb, 1974, p. 75). James would no doubt contend that neither Hebb nor Sappington are talking about free will.
Bandura’s disagreement with the unbridled external or environmental determinism of Skinner is not on the freedom versus determinism issue, it is on the issue of environmental versus personal or self determinism and on one-way versus reciprocal (and “triadic”) determinism (Bandura, 1978). Unlike Skinner, Bandura holds that personal determinants which we call _beliefs, goals, expectations_, and so forth, help account for behavior. Bandura agrees with Skinner that all macrolevel events are strictly determined.

In fact, Sappington himself was quite aware of Bandura’s determinism and cites a passage in which the latter rejected the idea of free will: “Persons are neither autonomous agents nor simply mechanical conveyers of animating environmental influences” (Bandura, 1989, p. 1182). Persons may not be machines. They may be complex systems or organisms. But their behavior is determined. Yet, despite this awareness, Sappington surmised that Bandura’s theory “deserves to be considered a theory of at least partial freedom” (p. 22). But, as James suggested, there is no such thing as partial freedom. The will is either free or it isn’t. Problems of this kind raised by the psychological discourse on freedom suggest that we must learn to do without the option of soft determinism and make, with James, our choice between libertarianism and hard determinism (Morf, 1998).

### EASTERN DETERMINISM

The contradictions raised by the notion of free will, the Wachovskian “anomaly” embodied by Neo, suggest a look at other cultures in which this notion appears to be absent. Given the looming presence of China in the 21st century and its long and well-known past, Chinese culture offers itself for purposes of such comparison. It is certainly distinct from Western culture. Geographically the two have been almost completely separated at different ends of the Eurasian continent until Portuguese and British ships rudely entered China’s coastal waters. East and West evolved different ways of thinking and perceiving, and markedly different ways of recording facts, stories, experiences and ideas for posterity.

Full disclosure: My understanding of matters Chinese is based on a keen interest in Chinese characters initiated by several short sojourns in China and on a number of mostly Western commentators on Chinese philosophy. My impressions, and that is what they are, have been alluded to before (Morf, in press; 2011).

### A word on the nature of Chinese characters

While the individual characters constituting Chinese writing almost always have individual meanings, especially meanings they had in the past, modern Chinese tends to present itself in two-character combinations or words which have their own more refined meanings and which enable the expression of new meanings in an ever changing world, particularly as it is affected by globalization and technology. It has been estimated that some 6000 characters are generally in use, and that they have generated some 60,000 two-character combinations, a number similar to that of generally used English words.

Thus, for example, one widely used equivalent in modern Chinese of the English (Latin) words _cause_ and _origin_ is 起因 (qǐyīn). Separate analysis of each character of two- and multi-character words and expressions is the first step taken here, although it
seems clear that such dissection seems more useful to analysis-oriented Westerners than to the more context- and relationship oriented Chinese (e.g., Lai, 2008., pp. 6-8). In this case, both 起 (“rise, raise, cause”) and 因 (“big man in enclosure”—dependent on someone or something) appear to contribute to the meaning of the two-character term (Henshall, 1998).

The relationships, as in this case, are often not immediately obvious. Sometimes a character’s function is to indicate sound rather than meaning. Sometimes there are characters within characters. Some characters—the radicals—appear in many different characters. The etymologies of characters offered by Chinese authors sometimes are folk etymologies lacking in supporting evidence or cogent deduction. There are traditional and simplified characters. Some characters are no longer in use on their own. Meanings change with time: Ancient meanings may be very different from modern meanings. On the other hand, Chinese characters started out as pictographs and they have long histories, both of these attributes make them useful sources for attempting to obtain some glimpses of Chinese ways of thinking in general and thinking about why we do what we do in particular.

**Chinese characters expressing the nature of will**

Two characters which appear useful in approaching Chinese conceptions of something like the western notion of will, and their Mandarin pinyin equivalents, are 志 (zhi) and 意 (yi). The etymologies of both, outlined earlier in Morf (in press), offer concrete clues to abstract Chinese ways of thinking.

志 (zhi) by itself sometimes stands for will. The lower half of the character is 心 (xīn, “heart-mind”), a “meaning component.” The upper half is 土 (tǔ; “earth, soil”), a “sound component” which also modifies the meaning component 心. According to Henshall (1998, p. 215), 志 is sometimes interpreted as “warrior plus heart” but appears more likely to have represented an “emerging plant plus heart.” 志 is said to mean “movement of the heart.”

意 (yi) is variously translated as “feelings, sentiment, intention.” This character too has two components. The perspicacious reader will again notice 心 (xīn, “heart-mind”) as the bottom half. 音 (yīn, “tone, sound,” “mouth blowing a flute”) is said to mean “oral expression of a thought” (Yoshida et al., 1969).

As noted above, it appears that the Chinese rely basically on some 6000 characters like 心 (xīn) or 意 (yi) and that their vocabulary today consists basically of two-character words. Two such words are of particular relevance in the discussion of will.

First, the combination of the two characters delineated above, 意志 (yizhi) is the Chinese equivalent of the western will given by both Zhang (2002) and the online NCiku dictionary (NCiku, 2010). The concrete roots of this two-character word suggest that it denotes things that arise in an organic manner, from within, or both. Its meaning seems to be quite different from that of the Western will which emanates with often explosive force from the cortex and/or from the faculty of ratio.

Second, the expression 任意 (rén yì; “arbitrarily,” “at will,” “random”) suggests that 意 (yi)—one of the individual characters referred to above—points to something quite different from the Western kind of will with its connotations of will power and self-determination.
Scrutiny of the etymological roots of the characters comprising the Mandarin term 自由的意志 (ziyòu de yízhi)—“freedom of the will”—suggest that it does not imply any power to decide between options in even the slightest way unencumbered by natural causes. It appears to signify something like Hume’s liberty of spontaneity, Bandura’s agency, and Deci’s self-determination. This impression may be reinforced by consideration of philosophical terms like 無為 (wúwéi) and 自然 (ziran) and by consideration of the Chinese way of construing the self essentially in terms of its relations to others (e.g., Lai, 2008).

**STRICT AND HESITANT DETERMINISM IN THE WEST**

Libertarian stances may be popular in the West, but the dominant philosophical Western tradition appears to be determinist. Its outlook is rooted in Greek philosophy and religion as noted above. In modern times it is exemplified by Hume who rejected the notion of liberty of indifference (implying an absence of cause) and adopted that of liberty of spontaneity (implying an absence of “hindrances” standing in the way of our doing what we want to do).

In psychology, however, the divisive and pervasive influence of free will is apparent. The divisive aspect manifests itself in the chasm between the objective, scientific camp and the subjective, experience-oriented, “human world,” or phenomenological camp. Simplifying things: some psychologists follow B.F. Skinner, others follow Carl Rogers. The pervasive aspect of the free will notion manifests itself in its appearance in even the scientific camp of psychology, in particular in a set of articles published with an introduction by Park (1999) under the rubric Science Watch in the American Psychologist.

At first sight, this prominently published special section exhibits the expected deterministic stance. Park’s introduction titled “Acts of Will?” sets a skeptical tone. The articles themselves elicited a number of defenses of free will in the Comments section of the July 2000 issue of the American Psychologist.

A closer look reveals a certain ambivalence. Sometimes the authors suggest that “all” behavior we attribute to our freely choosing selves is, in fact, determined by biological and environmental factors. Sometimes they suggest that only “most of” human behavior is so determined. This ambivalence seems evident in Park’s introduction and at least three of the five contributions. Park (1999) states categorically that “the source of behavioral control comes not from active awareness” (p. 461), a philosophical claim she seems to tone down somewhat in her characterization of “the authors of all four articles” as suggesting “that we perceive ourselves to have far more control of our ... behavior than we actually do.” Bargh and Chartrand (1999) cite Nietzsche’s categorical rejection of free will, their inspired title (“The Unbearable Automaticity of Being”) can be read as a gentle dig directed at proponents of free will, and their intent in their opening paragraphs appears to be to address the “two psychologies” issue (e.g., Morf, 1994, 1998), i.e., to examine both humanistic psychology which treats free will as a fact of subjective human experience and scientific psychology which sees no role for it in the “objective world.” But the bulk of their contribution is a scientific analysis suggesting less categorically that “most of” behavior is not the product “of conscious choice” (p. 465). Finally, Wegner and Wheatley (1999) anchor their case in Hume’s rejection of “cause”—let alone “will” or even “free will”—as something humans can observe or infer. Their title (“Apparent
Mental Causation”) creates determinist expectations. They conclude that their “analysis suggests that the real causal mechanisms underlying behavior are never present in consciousness” (p. 490). Never say “never,” and indeed the authors concede that “[t]he experience of will can be an indication that mind is causing action” (p. 490).

This ambivalence toward determinism reflects a tendency, common in psychology, to avoid making the distinction between a determinist (all behavior is determined by external and internal, environmental and biological factors) and what one might call a “hesitant determinist” stance which attributes only most of behavior to such determinants. But since postulating even the tiniest spark of free will is adopting the free will stance, this is an important distinction. The difference between a categorical all or never on one hand, and a more circumspect most of or almost never on the other, is the chasm between the two psychologies, humanistic psychology which does, and scientific psychology which does not invoke free will. It may be the chasm between mind and matter, between human experience and Hume’s “something” out there which the natural sciences like to probe to the extent possible given human brains and sensory organs. Given the discord arising from this chasm, it may be worth looking more closely at work addressing the question of whether, and perhaps how, the Chinese managed to avoid it.

REFERENCES

Chapter 9

Doing psychology with connectionist nets: The challenging route from simulation to theory

Chris Janeke
University of South Africa

SUMMARY

Connectionism (also called neural network modeling) exploded onto the cognitive science scene during the early 1980s, and has since grown into an extremely vibrant research area. However, the area has also become embroiled in a number of vexing philosophical issues about the place of connectionist simulations in psychological theory, and their explanatory value in relation to traditional information processing accounts of psychological processes. Hence, although connectionism is now an established, dynamic area of research, it is still clouded by theoretical controversies and debates. In this paper, a short historical overview of connectionism is first presented, after which its current theoretical status is discussed, some criticisms of connectionist modeling in psychology are reviewed, and new trends in connectionist research are mentioned. It is then argued that although connectionist modeling has some drawbacks, the approach is significant and valuable to cognitive scientists because it fosters a “synthetic” approach, a way of doing psychology by building computer simulations.

CONNECTIONIST MODELING IN COGNITIVE SCIENCE

Connectionism is the general research field in which neural networks are used to develop models and simulations of cognitive and neural processes. The approach captured the interest of psychologists and cognitive scientists during the 1980s, fostered an active research program, and became one of the primary modeling frameworks in both the cognitive and the neural sciences (e.g., Elman et al., 1996; Lytton, 2002; Quinlan, 1991). Schneider (1987) even hailed it as a “paradigm shift” in psychology. There is now a general consensus that connectionism is an important movement in cognitive science, as Hanson and Olson (1991) put it: “The neural network revolution has happened, we are living in the aftermath” (p. 4).

However, the approach has also been beset by a number of theoretical controversies about the nature of psychological explanation, about the virtues of connectionism in relation to the prevailing symbolic information-processing approach in cognitive psychology, and ultimately about the proper place of connectionist models in psychology and cognitive science (e.g., Bechtel & Abrahamsen 2002). Hence, despite its popularity, the true status of connectionism in psychology has been somewhat murky. Connectionist modeling has now been pursued for more than two decades in psychology, and it is therefore appropriate to begin to take stock of the approach. This paper attempts to do that, it presents a brief exposition of the connectionist approach, discusses its contribution to theoretical and empirical psychology, and reflects on where it is heading.
The connectionist framework

Connectionist models (aka. neural networks or parallel distributed processing systems) are adaptive computational systems based, in a general sense, on the processing mechanisms of the nervous system. They are functionally equivalent to multivariate statistical methods such as logistic regression, discriminant analysis, and principal component analysis (Abdi et al, 1999, p. 1), but have a distinct structure. These models are configured in terms of a parallel, distributed processing architecture, comprising small neuron-like computational units that process information in parallel. The units are massively interconnected in complex networks, hence the terms connectionist nets or neural nets that are commonly used to describe them in psychology and cognitive science.

It is convenient to think of the processing units in connectionist models as performing simple input-output mappings. Each unit functions as a node in a network that receives input and sends output activations (signals or numerical information) to other nodes. The output activation transmitted by any particular unit is governed by a few simple equations. Yet, despite the simplicity of these equations and the actual computations performed, these networks are powerful devices. The power of a connectionist net derives from two things. Firstly, the network exploits the collective activities of a multitude of neuron-like units, all processing information in concert, so that these systems are endowed with massively parallel processing abilities. Secondly, powerful learning algorithms have been developed that allow a net to approximate virtually any target function (Hornik et al., 1989). These learning capabilities make the approach suitable for exploratory research (e.g., data mining), but also for simulating aspects of human learning in cognitive science and artificial intelligence.

Connectionism has a long and a somewhat troubled history with a shorter surge of popularity in psychology. Researchers have been continuously experimenting with connectionist systems since the 1940s. The evolution of this research domain can be described in terms of two developmental stages.

The early stage: From Hebbian learning to the Perceptron

Connectionism actually has its philosophical roots in associationism, but its origin is usually traced to the cybernetic era. McCulloch and Pitts (1943) are generally thought to have initiated the modern field of neural network research when they showed that primitive logical operations can be executed by formal neurons with binary outputs, and that complex logical processes might emerge from the activity of collections of such neurons. Their goal was to define (formal) neurons capable of computing the truth value of a set of logical operations and they were able to demonstrate that any proposition or statement expressible in propositional logic can be represented by a network of simple processing units.

A few years later, Hebb (1949) proposed a learning procedure at the cellular level, which is now known as Hebb’s rule. The rule states that if two neurons on either side of a synaptic connection are activated simultaneously (i.e. in synchrony), then the strength of that synapse is selectively increased. Hebb further speculated that these synaptic modifications could result in neuronal assemblies in which associative connections between a whole network of cells are established. Although Hebb did not do this himself, the rule represents a form of learning that can be described in the language of
neural network modeling, because it implies a process of how weighted connections can be adjusted based on the positive or negative activations linking units.

Frank Rosenblatt (1958) experimented with a computational machine called the perceptron. In his book, *Principles of Neural Dynamics*, published in 1962, he reported on his investigation of various classes of such machines, most designed as two-layered networks with three types of units: sensory (S), associative (A), and response (R) units. The terminology used to describe the machine was deliberately cognitive in inspiration because Rosenblatt’s goal was to create a psychologically and neurally plausible model of the visual processing system (Rosenblatt, 1958). An important characteristic of the perceptron was that it could learn by means of a relatively simple error-correcting procedure. Rosenblatt presented a mathematical proof (the perceptron convergence theorem) that a perceptron can always learn to distinguish between two categories provided they can be separated using a linear discriminant function (Rosenblatt, 1962). The perceptron is now known to be similar to the multivariate statistical technique, discriminant analysis (Abdi et al., 1999, p. 108).

Widrow and Hoff (1960) developed a neural network known as the Adaline, which was an outgrowth of digital signal processing, and the first network to learn by an iterative procedure. The learning procedure used in the Adaline is a form of error minimization known as gradient descent. The process can only be explained properly using calculus, but intuitively it entails that weight changes are made in the direction of a downward slope (the gradient) leading towards the target values (i.e., the desired behavior of the network) at the bottom of the slope (see Gurney, 2003, pp. 53-63).

Minsky and Papert (1969) launched an attack at the perceptron, and indirectly also at the whole connectionist enterprise. They showed that despite the fact that the perceptron can be trained to differentiate between concave and convex lines, it cannot compute spatial connectedness as a category, and cannot recognize connectedness in 3-D solids. They also proved that it cannot learn parity and the “exclusive-or” (XOR) logical function. The critique was founded on an elegant mathematical analysis, but the essential argument boils down to the fact that the perceptron cannot discriminate between categories where a non-linear classification is required. Rosenblatt was aware of this problem and knew that it could be solved with multilayered networks, but could not devise a successful learning algorithm for such nets (Hecht-Nielsen, 1990, p. 17). The reputation of Minsky and Papert, both highly esteemed artificial intelligence (AI) researchers at MIT, and their detailed, rigorous mathematical analysis of the perceptron, coupled with a negative depiction of its ability to simulate human perceptual processes, had a dampening effect on further research on neural networks. Rosenblatt died shortly afterwards, and without his inspiration, the research programme began to dwindle.

The mature stage: Backprop and the PDP nets

Following Minsky and Papert’s critique of the perceptron, most research activity in AI and cognitive science shifted to symbolic computation. Not much explicit neural network research was conducted, but a body of research persisted under the rubrics of adaptive signal processing and pattern recognition (Hecht-Nielsen, 1990, p. 18). In addition a few staunch supporters, such as Stephen Grossberg at Boston University, and James Anderson at Brown University, continued to experiment with neural network modeling techniques.
A revival of interest in neural networks occurred when John Hopfield, a respected, Nobel-prize winning physicist, became interested in these models, and his research helped to spread the field within the scientific community. Hopfield’s most significant contribution was to suggest a close link between physical systems and neural networks. He pointed out that simple networks with symmetrical connections behaved as if they were minimizing a quantity analogous to the energy of a physical system (Hopfield, 1982). His approach focused on the principle of storing information as dynamically stable attractors and he explored the use of recurrent networks (i.e., networks that allow signals to flow in feedback loops) for developing computational models of associative memory, and for solving combinatorial optimization problems (Hopfield & Tank, 1985).

A problem with Hopfield’s network was that it could easily get stuck in suboptimal local minima in the energy landscape. Kirkpatrick et al. (1983) had shown that simple gradient descent searches could often be improved by a technique called simulated annealing which adds thermal noise and forces the system to make occasional uphill (instead of just downhill) moves in the energy landscape, thus allowing it to step out of the local minima. The Hopfield network and the simulated annealing technique were subsequently combined in a system called the Boltzmann machine (Hinton & Sejnowski, 1986). The work of Hopfield coupled with the development of the Boltzmann machine did much to re-establish the scientific legitimacy of connectionist modeling, but the real breakthrough came with the discovery of a learning algorithm called backpropagation.

The essentials of backpropagation were worked out by Werbos (1974) as a procedure for optimizing the predictive ability of mathematical models. The method was subsequently rediscovered independently by a number of different researchers, but is now usually attributed to Rumelhart et al., (1986). Backpropagation is a powerful learning method that can be applied to multilayered networks whereas most previous learning methods were restricted to two-layered (input-output) networks. It has been proved that a multilayered network with the appropriate number of units trained with backpropagation can approximate (i.e. learn to an arbitrary degree of accuracy) any real valued, deterministic function (Hornik et al., 1989). The algorithm is sometimes slow to settle into a solution, and does not scale up well with the size of the network (Uttal, 2005), but it does enable multilayer networks to discriminate between non-linearly separable categories, thus overcoming the restrictions of Rosenblatt’s perceptron.

**Modeling cognition with connectionist nets**

The discovery of backpropagation was followed shortly afterwards by the publishing of a two-volume set of books in which the foundations of the connectionist approach were laid out (Rumelhart McClelland & the PDP Group, 1986; McClelland, Rumelhart, & the PDP Group, 1986). Rumor has it that the first 6000 copies of the two volumes were sold out while they were still in print; such were the expectations of the scientific community (Schneider, 1987). Following the appearance of these books the field took off. Neural network modeling established itself as a significant, multi-disciplinary scientific enterprise, with its own society, scientific journals, and annual conferences. Several seminal research studies helped to showcase the power of neural network as a research technique, and simulation tool in psychology. Three examples of such studies are given below.
Hinton and Shallice (1991) developed a model to account for the co-occurrence of visual and semantic errors in deep dyslexia. They showed how damaging the semantic memory of a net designed to model reading processes produces the semantic errors of deep dyslexics. Similar to such patients, the net would substitute semantically related words such as boat and yacht for another while also making phonological substitutions. Plaut and Shallice (1993) further extended the model in a case study which occupied the complete 10th edition of the journal Cognitive Neuroscience. Their study represents an elaborate exploration of aspects of deep dyslexia based on a complex attractor model. Moreover, the model made some unique predictions. For example, it predicts a dissociation between cases that primarily involve word-concreteness effects accompanied by semantic errors and cases that are dominated by visual errors which are much less affected by word-concreteness. As Plaut and Shallice (1993, p. 481) point out in their discussion, this is just the type of dissociation that has been observed in some deep-dyslexic subjects and that has been difficult to explain using symbolic approaches. Stephen Kosslyn and his colleagues assessed the efficiency of using a split network versus a single network for processing visual-spatial information. The general issue they wanted to address is whether the brain contains separate systems for processing the location and shape of an object based on a hypothesis that there are two distinct subsystems within the visual-spatial pathway (Kosslyn, Chabris, & Baker, 1995). One subsystem represents categorical spatial relations, which contains information about orientation, location, and other spatial characteristics of one object relative to another object in terms of a broad equivalence class. The other subsystems is dedicated for the encoding of coordinate spatial relations, which specify an object’s spatial attributes with respect to another object in terms of precise metric coordinates. They constructed connectionist models to test the ease with which the two different types of mappings can be learned, and found that splitting the learning between the two tasks is computationally easier than construing it as a single learning task.

Rogers and McClelland (2003, 2008) developed a connectionist model of semantic memory and cognition. They created a structured network with different layers in the network representing items (plants and animals), their properties and relations to one another. They used the network to simulate the acquisition and organization of semantic knowledge, claiming that their simulations account for salient findings relating to the role of frequency, typicality, and expertise on semantic cognition, and that it also helps to elucidate the “progressive disintegration of conceptual knowledge observed in some kinds of dementia” (Rogers & McClelland, 2008, p. 690).

As these examples serve to illustrate, connectionist models are usually presented as computer simulations, and any discussion of these models therefore also requires one to consider the role that such simulations play in psychological theory. This issue is addressed again further in this paper.

**ISSUES AND DEBATES: CONNECTIONISM VERSUS THE SYMBOLIC PARADIGM**

While many researchers have endorsed the connectionist approach, there are also some who are not convinced that it constitutes a viable research framework. A number of related issues have been raised, mostly in connection with its contribution to theory and explanation in psychology and cognitive science. These issues are now often cast as a
debate between two distinct perspectives on cognition and how it should be explained. On the one hand there is a rule-bound, symbolic framework, and on the other hand there is the parallel distributed processing, connectionist approach (Hoffmann, 1998). In the context of this debate, several criticisms have been leveled at connectionism.

Some psychologists such as Broadbent (1985) contend that connectionist researchers have become confused about the proper level of psychological explanation. According to this criticism, connectionist nets are essentially just implementational devices, they help to illuminate how cognitive theories can be implemented in a parallel processing system, but the actual cognitive theory or explanation should be given at a higher, more abstract level.

Several researchers have argued that the claim that connectionist nets are neurally plausible is exaggerated. Thus, Harré (2002) maintains that the units in a connectionist nets are formal devices and only bear a very general relation to real neurons. There are no representations of neurotransmitters or of the chemical and molecular structure of the cell in most connectionist simulations used in psychology, there is more of a general analogy about the broad functioning of the net and real neural structures than a close correspondence between them. Uttal (2005, pp. 228-29) suggest that connectionism should “shed its biological metaphor,” and that the approach is more appropriately linked to network theories of cognition. He claims that the proper antecedents of connectionism lie in attempts to formulate a parallel-processing conception of semantic networks rather than in a purported analogy with biological mechanisms.

Green (2001) charges that if connectionist nets do not accurately represent actual neural structures, it remains unclear what exactly they do represent, how one should interpret a connectionist simulation, and what exactly the units in such nets and the patterns of activation between them denote. He contends that no satisfactory account of this has been offered by connectionist modelers, who simply assert that their nets model cognition without properly fleshing out these ideas.

Fodor and Pylyshyn (1988) present a now famous argument that connectionist nets are just associative engines and that they are inherently limited in their ability to satisfactorily model the structural aspects of language and thought. For example, they maintain that connectionist nets do not have a natural or straightforward way of inducing and representing syntactic categories, because the nets learn tokens rather than types. Fodor and Pylyshyn frame their criticism in terms of a property they call systematicity. They contend that when humans hear a simple declarative sentence such as John talks to Mary, they parse it in terms of syntactic categories, and would immediately know (i.e. infer) that Mary talks to John is also a possible sentence because the two sentences have the same constituents, the role of the two proper nouns are simply reversed. In contrast, connectionist nets lack insight into such systematic relations and a net trained on the first sentence would have to be retrained on the second sentence to parse it correctly.

Connectionist researchers have of course challenged these criticisms by showing that biologically plausible connectionist learning procedures exist (O’Reilly & Munakata, 2000) and by arguing that some of the problems associated with language processing can be overcome using different connectionist architectures. Thus, Elman (1990) experimented with a partially recurrent network, and showed that it is capable of acquiring basic syntactic categories. Smolensky (1988) again maintains that the distributed representations used in connectionist systems yield a more accurate reflection of human cognitive processes than symbolic representations, arguing that the
latter are only approximations to the more fundamental *subsymbolic* level of representations captured by connectionist models.

**THE POST-CONNECTIONIST ERA: QUO VADIS?**

The 1980s and 90s were the heydays of connectionism, and much of the growth and refinement of the approach occurred during that period. In the current, post 2010 period, the theoretical landscape has changed, and some researchers claim that connectionism no longer has the same vibrancy. Thus, Marcus (2010) asserts that research in connectionism is now mostly clustered under experienced modelers, and that there is not much innovation with regard to connectionist architectures.

Sharkey and Sharkey (2009) suggest that connectionism may have lost some of its “magic and mystery” (p. 190) as the basic theory, strengths and limitations of connectionist nets and their associated learning techniques became better understood. The mathematical and statistical aspects of the connectionist learning techniques have now been extensively analyzed and their computational properties are known (e.g., Bishop, 1995), so that connectionism no longer has the novelty that it enjoyed earlier. Moreover, several other statistical learning and pattern recognition techniques have been developed and these now vie with connectionism as frameworks for modeling in cognitive science and artificial intelligence. For example, in the first edition of Russell and Norvig’s (1999) popular artificial intelligence textbook (prescribed at more than 800 universities) a whole chapter was devoted to neural networks. In the latest edition (Russell & Norvig, 2010) neural networks are relegated to a short section of five pages, sharing a chapter on learning from examples with other machine learning techniques such as decision trees, ensemble learning, and Bayesian nets.

The impact of connectionism may have diminished in cognitive science, but the approach has certainly not become obsolete. New connectionist-based research studies still appear regularly in prominent psychology journals such as *Psychological Review* (e.g., French et al., 2011; Thomas et al., 2011), and well-known connectionist researchers such as McClelland, Hinton, and Grossberg continue to contribute to the field. Nevertheless, there are signs that the area is changing and some preliminary trends can be isolated, some of which are presented below.

A somewhat deflationary conception of connectionism has emerged. Thus, some proponents of connectionism now accept that neural networks are not suitable for modeling all aspects of cognition, but have particular strengths and weaknesses. Thus, McClelland (2009) notes that connectionist techniques are mainly useful for modeling automated (i.e., implicit) processes in memory, perception and learning. Connectionist systems are probably best characterized as the eponymous “associative engines” of Clarke’s (1993) book, and they are mostly suitable for implementing associative processing mechanisms (Anderson, 1995, p. 545).

There seems to be a growing divide between connectionists and proponents of the “classical,” symbolic paradigms. There have been some rapprochement between researchers in dynamical systems theory, and connectionism is in principle compatible with embodied notions of cognition in the light of its reliance on distributed representations which are constructed in interaction with environmental inputs, and thus grounded in the world (Sharkey & Sharkey, 2009, p. 19). As a result, some connectionist researchers are now aligning themselves with the proponents of an
“embodied cognitive science” perspective. Calvo et al. (2011) characterize this trend as signaling a post-connectionist era:

We are now in a post-connectionist era where the battle is not between classicism and connectionism, but rather between cognitivism—both classicist (symbolic) and connectionist (subsymbolic)—and a range of methodologies such as behavior-based AI, ecological psychology, embodied and distributed cognition, dynamical systems theory, and non-classical forms of connectionism. Under the banner of “embodied cognitive science,” these approaches are questioning not only the symbols-and-rules approach, but in some cases representationalism tout court. (para. 1)

Connectionism and the simulation methodology

Connectionist research is typically based on computer simulations, which are used to explore how aspects of cognition emerge via learning processes and exposure to suitable input data, and these simulations constitute a key aspect of the connectionist framework. Connectionism does not only provide an alternative to the traditional symbolic or “cognitivist” conception of cognition with regard to assumptions about cognitive processing and mental representations, but it also fosters a research methodology in which computer modeling plays a crucial part. Dawson (2004) refers to this computer modeling approach as a synthetic approach, a way of doing psychological research by building models, and contrasts it with an analytic approach in which logical analysis predominates.

In many respects running a connectionist simulation is similar to conducting an experiment. The researcher starts with a problem and a set of research questions and then designs an appropriate connectionist model as a tool for testing the research questions. In such an approach the use of a simulation fulfills much the same role as human or animal subjects and instruments in experimental research; it yields a mechanism for implementing and testing research questions and theories. If done properly, a connectionist simulation embodies a scientific conceptualisation (i.e., theory) and hypotheses about the structures and mechanisms underlying the relevant cognitive phenomenon, and running the simulation constitutes a way of testing the empirical predictions derived from the theory. In this sense a connectionist model is just a scientific theory expressed as a computer simulation.

In view of its strong mathematical basis and scientific grounding within a now well-established modeling framework, there is reason to believe that connectionism will remain an important movement in psychology and cognitive science. In a recent reflection on the past and future prospects of cognitive modeling, McClelland (2009) elaborated on how improvements in computer technology have impacted on the practical aspects of connectionist research. Advances in computer technologies, coupled with the increased availability of relatively powerful simulators, such as Emergent (Aisa et al., 2008), will almost certainly continue to have an effect on the future development of this approach. At present most connectionist applications are still quite small in scale, but progress in computer hardware and software resources could make it viable to experiment with larger and more complex networks, and may well steer the field in new and interesting directions.
REFERENCES


Chapter 10

Free will from an ethological perspective

Jannes Eshuis

Open Universiteit, The Netherlands

SUMMARY

In a recent debate between Baumeister (Baumeister, 2009a; Baumeister & Vohs, 2009) and Bargh (Bargh, 2009; Bargh & Earp, 2009) an age old question was revived: what is the nature of free will? After the boom of evolutionary psychology and its reductionist account of human behavior, a reconsideration of that question seems warranted. This paper aims to contribute to that reconsideration. Inspired by the mentioned debate, an attempt is made at giving an evolutionarily viable account of free will based on the ethological action selection model which is part of evolutionary psychology (Lorenz, 1950; Tinbergen, 1951). Showing how this seems impossible without thoroughly redefining the concept, it is discussed how free will should be dealt with in the social sciences after Darwin. It is concluded that it is not so much free will, but rather our belief in free will that is of interest.

BAUMEISTER VS. BARGH

Recently, the age old discussion about determinism and free will cropped up again at the convention of the SPSP. In contributions to the subsequent SPSP newsletter (Bargh & Earp, 2009; Baumeister & Vohs, 2009) and several outings by the leading figures in the debate on the Psychology Today blog (Bargh, 2009; Baumeister, 2009a) the whole affair eventually got nicked “The great debate on free will” (Baumeister, 2009b). The primary difference of opinion was provoked by recent research findings of Baumeister, Masicampo and DeWall (2009) concerning the effect of the belief in free will. A lack of such belief apparently induces an increase of objectionable behaviors such as cheating and stealing. Obviously such findings, however interesting, never may lead to the conclusion that free will exists; just as the fact that children believe in Santa Claus does not necessarily mean that he actually exists. In spite of that, apparently opinions differed on the subject, leading Baumeister to suggest that free actions are real (Baumeister & Vohs, 2009).

According to Baumeister mankind has been able to create and sustain culture, which sets us apart from all other species, because we have been able to free ourselves from animal ways of behaving. It is free will, that allows us to overcome our instincts and conditioned reflexes that define animal life. It makes us help other people, it prevents us from lying, cheating and stealing; in other words, it makes us live together in a civilized manner. Note, with Bargh (2009), the shifting meaning of free will in Baumeister’s account: he speaks of free will and the belief in free will interchangeably. Eventually Baumeister lists four types of action that are, according to him, free: self-control; rational, intelligent choice; planning; and initiative. Most notably however, Baumeister states that “crucially, our research … is suggesting that all four of these draw from one common psychological resource that gets depleted after use. Hence there is some kind
of common ‘will,’ whether free or not, that draws on a common stock of willpower to accomplish [these free actions]” (Baumeister, 2009b, p. 1).

Please note two things. First of all Baumeister seems to hold that free actions are accomplished by drawing on a common “will” that might not be free. This seems contradictory. How can an action partly be dependent on an unfree will and still be completely free? A free action should be caused by nothing at all, because being caused by anything would render it unfree. Most importantly however, is the fact that this crucial “common stock of willpower” gets depleted after use. Apparently free will is partially determined by the presence of some psychic energy, which in itself is determined by yet other factors. Doesn’t that violate the notion of free will once more?

Parallel to the questions raised here, is the fact that Baumeister’s notion of a stock of willpower that gets depleted after use, echoes a notion of determined instinctive activity from ethology (Lorenz, 1950; Tinbergen, 1951). The remainder of this paper will explore this parallel and use it to investigate the feasibility of Baumeister’s notion of free will. First an expanded version of the ethological model is expounded. Then we explore what kind of account of free will this model allows. Finally we will show how Baumeister’s account relates to this ethological account of free will.

THE EXPANDED ETHOLOGICAL MODEL

Classic evolutionary psychology, with its massive modularity thesis, has a heavily determinist model of behavior (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992; Buss, 1995; Tooby & Cosmides, 2000). The human mind is suggested to consist of highly specialized domain specific information processors that, once triggered by specific stimuli, elicit the right response to relevant environmental conditions. Such accounts offer a closed system of biological explanation. They do not allow any other kind of influence from the social environment, but the strictly causal role of eliciting the right response from an otherwise impermeable mental module. Any kind of constitutive role for the social environment is therefore ruled out, because it would need a domain general mental apparatus able to deal with novelty, rather than a pile of domain specific modules (cf., Franks, 2011).

Recently, several attempts have been made to open up this closed system of evolutionary psychology by allowing the social environment such a constitutive role in the formation of mind and culture (Barrett, 2011; Franks, 2011; Henrich & McElreath, 2009; Richerson & Boyd, 2005). For instance, Eshuis (submitted) claims that the inability of evolutionary psychology to allow for a constitutive role of social factors, is the result of an inadequate reading of the ethological model that is generally adopted as one of the cornerstones of evolutionary psychology. Proceeding from that claim, an expanded ethological model is presented (Eshuis, 2010), which derives its main principles from the ethological explanatory framework (Lorenz, 1950; Tinbergen, 1951, 1963).

Central to that model is the selectionist principle that originated in the work of Charles Darwin. Within that framework, explanations are exclusively given on a behavioural level. This is not to deny that behavior is somehow supported by physiological machinery, however, in line with Lehrman (1953) and Tinbergen (1963), it is held that no isomorphic relation between behavior and biology exists, meaning that an explanation for behavior should be given on the behavioral level. Consequently, behavior is not explained from internal relations within the physiological machinery of the organism, but from relations between the organism and its environment. This relation is shaped by two fundamental processes, which are separated by the moment of
conception. First, during ultimate phylogeny, behavioral dispositions are formed as the result of a specific evolutionary history. Second, during proximate ontogeny, these dispositions are refined and tuned in a primarily social environment. These two processes leave dormant conations in the organism, which form affective ties with the environment and can be described as behavioral goals that the organism is designed to achieve within that environment. Once the appropriate environmental conditions present themselves, they awaken the dormant conation within the organism, which then incites it to act towards the behavioral goal (Eshuis, 2010).

Such a model explicitly leaves room for a constitutive role for the social environment, however, it is also very much a determinist model, in the sense that most, if not all behaviors that are arising from the organism’s encounter with the environment, are implicit acts towards goals of which both the act and the goal stay largely outside of consciousness during execution. This leads us essentially to the same question that was central in the debate between Baumeister and Bargh: assuming that behavior is indeed based on evolved and socially trained dispositions, which are elicited through an encounter with the environment: is there anything left to “will”?

**IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT STRATEGIES**

In functionalist accounts, such as evolutionary psychology, predictable adequate action patterns are usually defined as behavioral strategies (Buss, 1995). Such strategies need not be strategically planned in the literal sense. On the contrary, they usually are implicit strategies, operating outside of our consciousness. From such a perspective, free will can best be defined as the opposite: explicit strategies. To be explicit, such strategies need to be conscious, in order to enable the individual to explicate them. They also should be volitionally planned, because without such planning they would simply become an explication of behavior that was determined otherwise. From a psychological viewpoint, the fundamental question then becomes: do we really plan ahead, or are our explications just explanation after the fact?

Libet’s research (e.g., Libet, Gleason, Wright, & Perl, 1983) on the time lag in our consciousness suggests the latter. In his experiments he showed how our brain actually seems to decide for us, before we feel that we decide. The only function Libet assigned to our will was that of an emergency break: we do not consciously instigate actions, but we are able to abort them on reflection. This seems to imply that our physiology generates behavioral strategies, of which our mind might decide whether they should be carried out at all. Note that this position leaves some room for choice, in the sense that of two strategies we might decide not to carry out the first and thereby we indirectly choose the second. Although Libet’s experiments have been debated, his research made clear that the assumption that our mind decides for our body how we should behave, has severe limitations.

Of course, much earlier such a position was advocated by James (1890a) and Lange (1887) who both argued that we are afraid of a bear because we run away from it. More precisely, because we find ourselves trembling and sweating after running as fast as we could, we become aware of these bodily sensations in terms of a feeling of fear. This famous example is age-old, but it currently receives support, for instance from Wilson (2004) and Damasio (2003). On the basis of neurological research they conclude that basic emotional reactions are primarily biological reactions in the phylogenetically older parts of our brain, which are initiated on the basis of immediate bodily taxations
of what happens to us. This taxation, together with the reaction in the brain, constitutes the basic emotions, which sets our body in motion. However, at the same time, areas in the higher brain parts register this emotional state of the body and cause some conscious awareness. It is this awareness of sweating, heartbeat, tension, and so on that reveals itself as feelings (Damasio, 2003). Thus feeling happy, sad, fearful and so on, is but a reflection of the emotional state we are already in. Similar ideas have been proposed in social psychology—for instance, research by Bargh (1997; Bargh & Chartrand, 1999) and Dijksterhuis (2004) show that in everyday life, the bulk of our actions occur without conscious deliberation. They have become part of automated routines to such an extent that we do not even know how we do it. Conscious deliberation sometimes only disrupts the fluidity of our automaticities, as every skilled musician knows. Particularly in very complex situations, like deliberating whether to buy a new house, our intuitive gut feelings seem to lead to more successful results than rational decision making.

All in all, current research from neurology and social psychology seems to confirm the Jamesian approach, and Libet’s experiments. Recent elaborations on Libet’s original paradigm also support his findings (Kühn & Brass, 2009; Matsushashi & Hallett, 2008): conscious deliberation appears to follow physiology, rather than the other way around. Or to return to our previous terminology: our behavioral strategies seem to be implicit rather than explicit, even to the extent that we might wonder if something like an explicit strategy exists at all.

FREE WILL FROM AN ETHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

At this point the reader should be reminded of the mentioned parallel between Baumeister’s contradictory notions of partly determined free will on the one hand and the general notion of instinct from classical ethology. Ethology has always been primarily concerned with the behavior of animals in their natural habitat, and thus largely ignored the question of mind. Both Lorenz (1950) and Tinbergen (1951) assumed animal awareness to exist, but at the same time ignored it, more or less on behaviorist grounds. This is not to say that they didn’t touch on the topic. Even Tinbergen, the most rigorous scientist of the two, explicitly made room for the analysis of subjective experience. It just had to be kept strictly separate from the objectivistic analysis of behavior (Tinbergen, 1942).

In several field experiments they showed how behavior was the result of a subtle balance between internal motivation and external stimulation. On the one hand they noticed how specific behaviors, if not elicited in time, could turn up spontaneously as if their motivational source ran over. On the other if such behaviors were triggered time after time, they would temporarily stop turning up, as if their source got depleted. In other words, just as decades later Baumeister would do, they concluded there must be a common stock of motivational energy. They constructed an intricate psychohydraulic model in which behavior is explained by motivational energies that are blocked until relevant environmental conditions release them (Tinbergen, 1940). These energies flow from top to bottom through a multileveled action-selection hierarchy that consists of a multitude of such psychohydraulic nodes, forming a hierarchy of internal motivation, leading from general appetitive behavior, through intermediate levels, to the tiniest consummative activities of the organism. Obviously this hierarchy must be taken with a grain of salt. It is a behavioral model, with no specific relations to the underlying physiology. But within these limitations it can be understood as the result of phylogeny
and ontogeny, making it a model of the affective, conative side of the behavioural mechanism. When the organism meets relevant environmental conditions, these awaken top level appetites which entice the organism to get involved in the situation. Once involved, the organism encounters more detailed stimuli which awaken more specific appetites, enticing the organism towards more specific involvement and so on (Tinbergen, 1951). Note that all these behaviors need not be explicit. On the contrary, such a model is precisely the kind of model that could map the implicit strategies and automaticities discussed in the previous paragraph; but where does Baumeister’s common stock of willpower fit in?

Each level in the hierarchy is on the one hand fed by internal stimulation from upper levels and on the other by releasing stimuli that let the energy flow down the hierarchy. Unlike other levels, however, the top level has no blocking mechanism, subsequently needs no releasing triggers and thus is constantly feeding the levels below. It is important to note that Tinbergen was forced to assume this particular make up, to be able to explain specific phenomena such as vacuum activity and displacement behavior (Tinbergen, 1940, 1951). Nodes on this top level apparently are purely motivational. They tell the organism continually, to get food, to reproduce, to migrate and so on. They are the most basic appetites that keep the relation between the organism and its environment online. They make the organism pay attention to its surroundings. When the organism encounters relevant stimuli, these unlock nodes on lower levels, allowing the motivational energy to flow further down to more specific levels. When the organism does not encounter such stimuli, the energy just causes appetitive behavior, leading the organism to freely explore the environment according to its own internal drive.

This top level node from the ethological model seems to be conceptually equivalent to Baumeister’s (2009b) common stock of willpower: it contains motivational energy, it feeds more specific action strategies and it can be depleted after frequent use. However, when staying true to that ethological model, the concept of “free will” is not what Baumeister intended it to be. It is not an uncaused causer, but a specific situation in the balance between internal and external stimulation of an organism. It is the total absence of external demands, which allows the organism to act purely on its central motivations. This is probably the closest that one will get to a concept of “free will” from an ethological point of view. It is then defined in two parts: (1) “will”: the most general, internal drive of the organism; which is (2) “free”: meaning free from external direction. Note that free will in this way does not need to be an explicit strategy. There is no conscious planning involved. Free will, thus defined, can be entirely implicit. It is what drives a dog to run around and follow its nose once it is unleashed. In this way “free will” is completely stripped from its colloquial meaning of “agentic choice” and turned into something like “unconstrained instinct.” Such a definition of free will is intriguing, but also utterly deterministic, and therefore not what Baumeister means when discussing the “inner processes associated with free actions” (Baumeister, 2009b). In other words: we stumble across the exact same contradiction that Bargh (2009) pointed out in his response to Baumeister.

**True volition is a private matter**

A possible escape route out of this contradiction is explored by Watkins (1999), who covers similar territory in *Human freedom after Darwin*. He suggests that an autonomous free will might exist, but is constantly under attack from external control.
He then distinguishes this control into true external control (e.g., imprisonment) and internal control caused by an external agent (e.g., hypnosis). In both cases, freedom is the absence of such control and the organism being able to act without constraint. Proceeding from there, Watkins becomes contradictory, in several ways. First of all he poses “loss of self-control” as another threat to our freedom. This seems strange, because he is in the middle of proving the existence of a free agent, and at the same time seems to presuppose such an agent. How can it otherwise lose self-control? More importantly, however, this presumption of an active agent seems to contradict with yet another form of control that Watkins adds: internalized societal demands. This renders his attempt to prove free will rather useless, because it is hard to imagine any type of behavior that is not touched by societal demands. So, on the one hand Watkins presupposes the existence of an active agent and on the other he assumes that this agent will never be free because it is always subject to social influence. In other words: for Watkins, free will is a hypothetical possibility that in actual practice never occurs.

The real problem here, I propose, is that freedom and free will are approached rationally by Watkins, while both are essentially experiential phenomena. Note for instance that James always emphasized that true volition is something outside of the scope of rational science because it is a private matter that only becomes real when one believes in it (James, 1884, 1890a). Freedom cannot be rationalized; it is a matter of feeling. If Watkins wouldn’t envisage internalized societal demands as a threat to our freedom, but as one of many factors that determine what an individual becomes—as is the case in the expanded ethological account—“free will” would not be under attack of internalized norms, but would be an experience that accompanies the behavior of an individual happily following those norms. Obviously all of our behavior is tightly shaped during upbringing but we can still feel free to act as we please, and we don’t need an active agent to experience that feeling. Free will, then, is the feeling of getting a drink because we are thirsty, without being withheld by anyone from getting that drink, but also without realizing that it is our own body that dictates that we are thirsty in the first place. It is the feeling that accompanies the act of going out wearing nice clothes, without feeling constrained by anyone to do otherwise, but also without realizing that wearing clothes in public is complying with a societal norm we have been so well trained to follow that we don’t even know it.

Free will, thus, is a matter of feeling that one is able to function as one likes, and in this regard our expanded ethological account, differs significantly from Watkins’ in two ways. First of all, as opposed to Watkins, the ethological account explains where those likes originate: they are biologically evolved and socially trained preferences. Free will is nothing but the experiential phenomenon that goes with acting upon those preferences. Secondly, the ethological account doesn’t contain an active agent, just a feeling that is tied to unconstrained appetitive behavior. Watkins on the other hand, somehow presupposes the existence of an active agent, and then hides it behind the argument that this agent will never be completely free. In this regard the ethological account seems preferable, because it is not presumptive, does not invoke a ghost in the machine, and is therefore the more parsimonious one.

The redundancy of the central scrutinizer

Summing up, there seems to be a place for free will, even in an evolutionary inspired ethological account. That free will, however, is an experiential phenomenon that
accompanied unconstrained appetitive behavior which is determined by evolution and social training. Consequently, this free will seems to be not volitional in the sense that it is strategic and conscious. It is the explicit feeling that comes with our implicit behavioral strategies. The question remains, however, whether we need any kind of conscious planning. If we are so well equipped by evolution and social training, do we need an explicit strategic planner at all?

A classic example of an act of conscious will is the Jamesian notion that conscious will arises when two or more implicit behavioral strategies are equally weighted with a feeling of urgency. He actually lists five possible ways in which decision are made (James, 1890b, pp. 531ff.). Of these, the first four are decisions that are made for us, either because we weighed all the evidence, or because we’re forced towards a hasty decision because of fatigue, time constraints, or mood swings. And then there is the fifth type of decision in which there is, according to James, the feeling that we apply a certain conscious effort to tip the scales. This happens in instances when a decision is called for and the evidence gathered so far did not lead to a conclusion. His famous example from the Dilemma of Determinism (James, 1884) is the walk home from one of his lectures: the end is already determined, but the choice between walking through Oxford Street or Divinity Street is left to his conscious will. What he essentially is saying, is that usually our behavior is determined, by instinct, emotion, upbringing, environmental conditions and so on, but when from several courses of action there is none that is more urgent than others, then conscious will decides.

There is something odd about this position, because in fact it claims that conscious will as an active agent, only has any influence if all actions are equally appropriate and the decision is not important at all. On what grounds, other than randomness, does our conscious will then decide? Even more so: how often is such a situation of complete equality of behavioral strategies supposed to take place? In general, one would assume, any of several strategies will rise up slightly more urgent than others, and if exactly equal, circumstances will usually change so fast that only tenths of seconds later—before any conscious deliberation could have taken place—one of those strategies will have become more urgent than others. Looking at it that way, the whole question of a conscious mandate becomes rather trivial. In general one could say that, at least when approaching human behavior from an ethological perspective, we don’t need something like an active agent to decide on human activity, simply because internal motivations and external conditions probably will do the trick without any central scrutinizer (Zappa, 1979).

WHAT THEN IS EXPLICIT?

Concluding, it seems that the type of free will that the Baumeister refers to is too much determined to deserve the label ‘free’, even more so, his seemingly ethological position leads to the conclusion that free will might exist but is unnecessary. When evolved dispositions and social fine tuning thereof shape our behavior into rather adaptive strategies that usually meet their mark, why would we need an expensive decision maker in our head to only decide on our actions when a decision in fact is unnecessary because no particular action is urgent anyway? We might as well decide that anything we call an explicit strategy is effectively nothing but a post hoc explanation of our own actions. This leaves us with a problem, because we now have completely reduced free will to some redundant epiphenomenon, while at the same time it is a psychological
reality. Our feeling, of having a free will, unquestionably exists, making it a subject of scientific research that deserves attention. From an evolutionary standpoint, the conclusion that free will is an experiential concept is rather interesting, because it shifts the question from “what is the function of free will?” to “what is the function of the feeling of free will?” Why do we make up these post hoc explanations of our own actions? Bargh (2009), for instance, suggested we make these up because they help us maintain our self-esteem. In fact, this comes close to Wegner (2002) who essentially claims that our sense of control is nothing but an illusion: we simply become aware of our bodily decision to act and the effect of our actions, and consequently perceive a certain causality between that awareness and the act, resulting in the illusion of conscious control which gives us a sense of authorship over our behaviour. Obviously, this illusion of free will can and should be studied, but it should not be invoked as part of the causal chain, because it is an experiential concept that simply does not belong in a determinist account.

REFERENCES


Mariner.


Chapter 11

Psychological inquiry and disciplinary psychology:
Distinct problematics

Rachel Joffe Falmagne
Clark University, USA

SUMMARY

Historically constructed disciplines are bound by their particular institutional genealogies and methodological identities. This paper analytically disengages psychological inquiry as a mode of inquiry from psychology as a discipline and considers its distinctive contribution to transdisciplinary investigations such as feminist theory, critical race theory, postcolonial study and others, whose objects of knowledge integrate material, institutional, discursive and agentic constituents of social processes. As a thread in such investigations, psychological inquiry is conceptualized as distinctively focusing on processes at a “grain of analysis” that preserves the singular particularity of the “person” while at the same treating the person as an element in the systemic working of the social world, analysis that honors poststructuralist insights on the discursive construction of subjectivities but that distinctively assumes the ontological continuity of the person through moments of discursive construction. The notion “grain of analysis” rather than “level of analysis” is intended to connote the inseparability of the person from the rest of the system in this analysis. Illustrative examples of what such a mode of inquiry can contribute to those fields are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Historically constructed disciplines carry with them their particular institutional genealogies and methodological identities. Regarding psychology in particular, the genealogical roots of the production of individuality it embodies, its genesis in and contributions to governmentality and technologies of power, and the economic and political rationalities that led to its methodological commitments have been well documented and critically interrogated and do not need to be rehearsed here (Danziger, 1990; Hacking, 2007; Hook, 2007; Rose, 1998). Those commitments are actualized into the production of particular modes of knowledge, and further solidified into regimes of legitimation once they are institutionalized in their disciplinary form.

The policing of boundaries is an integral part of this institutional organization of knowledge. The disciplinization of the academy has produced artificial divisions between inquiries at different levels of analysis, divisions that have become reified through the attendant institutional categories and truth apparatuses. The existing disciplinary organization of knowledge is, of course, a historically contingent phenomenon. So is the theoretical ontology that this partitioning of knowledge has produced, such as the ontological separation between the individual and the social that has largely segregated psychology as a discipline from the rest of the social sciences. Recent transdisciplinary knowledge production projects usefully subvert this organization by reconceptualizing their objects of inquiry along broader, theoretically
meaningful lines aligned with the nature of the phenomenon rather than with disciplinary allegiances, whether substantive or citational.

I see it as essential to analytically disengage psychological inquiry as a mode of inquiry from psychology as a discipline and to reconceptualize it as one thread in transdisciplinary investigations of social processes. As described below, psychological inquiry is conceived as a mode of inquiry analytically distinct from other modes whilst systemically integrated with them within a transdisciplinary frame of interpretation. In transdisciplinary fields such as feminist theory, critical race theory, postcolonial study and others, whose objects of knowledge integrate material, institutional, and discursive constituents of social processes at different levels of organization, what is distinctive about psychological inquiry as a mode of analysis participating in that systemic framework? What contributions can psychological inquiry, as a particular mode of analysis not linked to the discipline, make to these fields? The following discussion addresses those issues and offers illustrative examples of the substantive contributions produced by such a mode of analysis for a comprehensive analysis of social processes. Issues concerning the relation of theoretical psychology to psychology as a discipline are considered in the final discussion.

PSYCHOLOGICAL INQUIRY IN A TRANSDISCIPLINARY WORLD

Psychological inquiry is conceptualized here as distinctively focusing on processes at a grain of analysis that preserves the singular particularity of the “person” while at the same time treating the person as an element in the systemic working of the social world—the notion “grain of analysis” rather than “level of analysis” is intended to connote the inseparability of the person from the rest of the system in this analysis. Two preliminary notes of caution will be useful. Importantly, this formulation does not reference the person as conceptualized in mainstream psychology and Western thought, but rather as the singular social agent in the systemic workings of social processes at different levels of organization. The next section puts forward such a reconstructed notion of the person from the theoretical perspective guiding this article. In subsequent sections, I explore the contributions that psychological inquiry, understood as relying on this kind of notion, can offer to transdisciplinary investigations of social processes. As well, as will be discussed later, it is recognized here that some contemporary theoretical perspectives on subjectivity guided by poststructuralist insights elide any notion of a person in favor of a stress on fluidity, contingency and/or discursivity; however, but I will argue that the notion is present imminently and necessarily in their formulations.

“Person,” certainly is a debated notion at the present historical time in the postmodern intellectual West. The poststructuralist and constructionist suspicions concerning the person are closely related to critiques of the “self” as coherent, bounded, stable and individualized, that is, the notion of the self that has been promulgated by the “psy disciplines” as a regulative ideal, to quote Nikolas Rose (1998). In his critical history of psychology as a social science and of the role it has played in governmentality and in the construction of individualizing ontologies, Rose eloquently discusses the conceptual challenges to the self that have been articulated by feminist theorists, psychoanalytic theorists, philosophers, anthropologists and others. However, and crucially, he also cogently observes: “These contemporary conceptual challenges to
the self are, of course, themselves historical and cultural phenomena” (Rose, 1998, p. 5).

Concurring with this observation, I further submit that, significant as they are, these critical challenges have become in a sense a new regime of truth, not among the general public but within certain circles in academia. They tend not to be reflexively historicized and recognized as historical and cultural productions. The same issue is present for contemporary challenges to any notion of a person. These challenges are best seen as simultaneously essential and contingent. While critiques such as those reviewed by Rose (1998) and Hook (2007) are essential in destabilizing the assumptions underlying modern notions of a person, in particular the assumptions current in disciplinary psychology, caution is needed to avoid solidifying them as a new regime of truth.

From a metatheoretical perspective committed to eschewing unnecessary dualisms, critiques can instead be put at the service of a project of critical reconstruction that reconceptualizes on new grounds notions that are indispensable (Falmagne, 2009). Stuart Hall refers to identity as such a notion, “an idea which cannot be thought in the old way but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all” (Hall, 1996a, p. 1). I submit that “person” is such a notion, and that “there is nothing to do but to continue to think with it albeit in [its] detotalized and deconstructed forms, and no longer operating within the paradigm in which [it] was originally generated,” to quote Hall (p. 2).

As discussed below, it is assumed here that a notion of a person, in a specific, non-modern sense of “person” is a theoretical necessity, even as its specific aspects will be construed differently in different theoretical frameworks. Along related lines but with a specific critical focus, Hook (2007), while largely endorsing Foucault’s analysis of the operation of power in the constitution of subjects—“the soul”—notes that while Foucault avoids psychological discourse, he can be argued to refer to a psychological process: “[I]t does seem difficult to deny that power is internalized, […], that it is lent something akin to a psychological dimension and mode of operation. A strategic reference to the language of ‘the psychological’ might thus profit the analysis of power” (pp. 28-29). I would further suggest that a notion of a person is present imminently in Foucault’s formulation. Likewise, from a different starting point and agenda, Brown and Stenner (2009), noting that there are engagements of the psychological in many other disciplines such as art, literature and theater, submit: “We also have a kind of obligation to try to follow attempts to articulate the psychological wherever they lead us”, and that “we might say that ‘psychology’—broadly defined as the study of what it is to be a person—is everywhere” (p. 5).

**CONCEPTUALIZING THE “PERSON”**

From the present theoretical perspective, elaborated more fully elsewhere (Falmagne, 2004), the reconstructed person involves several characteristic features. First, while subjectivity is seen to be constituted discursively and to be complex, situated and unstable, as has been argued from a variety of poststructuralism-inflected theoretical perspectives, the substantive person is seen as the anchor of the discursive processes that contribute to the constitution of his/her subjectivity—discursive processes and subjectivity require an anchor, a site, a body.
Second, the person has ontological continuity, in the strict, limited philosophical sense that there must be continuity of reference between different moments of discursive construction. That is, conceptually, the person must be individuated as the same element through these moments. With respect to theoretical claims about fluidity and instability, subjectivity can be said to be unstable only if it is the same element whose subjectivity we contrast at different moments. This is seen as a theoretical necessity for discourse-theoretic construals, so that even as discourse-theoretic discourse elides the notion of a person, it is present imminently in the substantive theoretical claims, lest they be incoherent.

Third, and more broadly, the person is one grain of analysis in the systemic workings of the social world, in which processes at different levels are interrelated and mutually constitutive: A person’s subjectivity is constituted through her/his social location in a gendered, racialized and class stratified material and discursive world and through the local discursive processes in which she/he has participated. Thus, the framework is systemic and the person constitutes but one grain of analysis in this system.

Finally, a fourth aspect of this reconstructed “person” is crucial: the cumulative nature of her/his social constitution. The positionings the person takes on are constructed, in part, on the basis of her/his personal and affective history. The experiences that the person has now, while being discursively produced (Scott, 1992) are configured by earlier experiences as well. Of course, the trajectory of the person’s subjectivity over time is at all times embedded in processes of social constitution. The singular psychological process cannot be disengaged from the larger system, and an individual biography is psychosocial in nature. Yet an individual affective and subjective trajectory is singular as well as biographically continuous and cumulative in the sense that “the past is the genealogy of the present” (Falmagne, 2004, p. 238).

Thus, this reconstructed notion of the person is guided by poststructuralist insights on the discursive construction of subjectivities, and it has some points of convergence with current poststructuralist or discourse-theoretic discussions of the “subject.” However, it departs from those by its explicit stress on the ontological continuity of the person through moments of discursive construction, the biographical singularity of the person, and the temporally cumulative nature of “experience”. Its semiotics also signals an explicit acknowledgement that we are referring to human beings, and an implicit recognition of embodiment and materiality.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL INQUIRY, THE PARTICULAR, AND THE SYSTEMIC**

To return to the central concerns of this paper, we can conceive of psychological inquiry as a mode of inquiry relying on a distinctive grain of analysis of complex, multilayered social processes, where no process can be extricated from the systemic functioning of the whole—a mode of inquiry focusing on processes pertaining to the singular person (understood in the reconstructed sense just discussed) while at the same time treating the person as an element in the systemic working of the social world.

The specific form psychological inquiry takes is of course configured by the theoretical perspective from which it emerges. As noted, some theoretical proposals evidently might repudiate some of the features mentioned above, but the implicit assumption of a singular subject can be argued to be present imminently in their
formulation (Butler, 1990, 1997; Foucault, 1982). Thus, they have the potential of enabling inquiries in which that subject is particularized as a person with a lived, cumulative socio-affective trajectory. The remainder of this section considers the significance of such a mode of inquiry for a systemic approach to social processes.

In ensuring that the singular person, in her/his psychosocial and biographical particularity is a constitutive element in the theoretical narrative, this mode of analysis can provide important contributions to transdisciplinary projects such as feminist theories, postcolonial studies, critical race theory or other transdisciplinary approaches to social processes. For instance, when Nikolas Rose (1998), following Foucault, discusses how modern subjectivity is produced by the mechanisms involved in governmentality, by the social institutions as human technologies, and by the dominant ethical technologies of the self (Foucault, 1986), inquiry conducted at a psychological grain of analysis and with attention to the psychosocial and biographical particularity of persons can expose the nuanced, complex, agentic, and personal way in which this shaping of the self is instantiated and, in doing so, enrich and complexify the analysis of the systemic workings of power. Rose and Foucault are, after all, talking about human beings.

Along related lines, this kind of psychological inquiry can productively enhance Butler’s (1997) theoretical description of the political and discursive processes of subjectification. While Butler’s analysis does rely in part on psychoanalytic discourse in describing the production of subjects, hers is an abstract, generic, interchangeable subject. An inquiry honoring the trajectory through which particular subjects are produced over biographical time through processes of subjectification will contribute to a fuller account of the cumulative nature of social constitution as viewed through a Butlerian lens as well as illuminate the complex operation of those processes as they are instantiated in particularized trajectories and in particular intersections with other forces of social constitution.

Equally, when Stuart Hall, in “New Ethnicities,” analyzes the shifting construction of the black subject in terms of “the machineries and regimes of representation” through which the black subject is constituted, along with the extra-discursive events and structures that underlie those representations (Hall, 1996b, p. 443), there is a place for psychological inquiry into the complex and particularized ways in which particular psychosocial agents engage with those processes of social constitution in ways inflected by their affective and subjective biographical trajectories.

To clarify, this is not merely to suggest that psychological investigations guided by Hall, Rose, or Butler’s ideas would be and are valuable, although this is certainly the case. Rather, it is to submit that for a comprehensive theoretical analysis of—in those examples—the production of subjects, it is critical to incorporate a psychological grain of analysis in the systemic functioning of processes of social constitution, and to illuminate the manner in which these processes are instantiated in particularized subjects considered in their biographical psychosocial “experience.” Thus, to conclude with a last example, when Paula Moya, a literary scholar, discusses a postpositivist realist theory of Chicana identity that theorizes the linkages between social location, experience, epistemic privilege and cultural identity and that acknowledges “how the social categories of race, class, gender and sexuality function in individual lives without reducing individuals to these social determinants” (Moya, 2000, p. 80), a psychological grain of analysis of the complex and particularized ways in which those processes are instantiated not only enriches but puts flesh on that theoretical formulation.
Indeed there is a recent expression by other disciplines of a need for this grain of analysis, as signaled by the “biographical turn” in sociology (Chamberlayne et al., 2000, 2002), or by the “affective turn” in the social sciences (Brennan, 2004; Clough, 2007). In fact, the report of a recent conference on the biographical turn in historiography notes “historiography has shifted from concentrating on structures and numbers to a cultural history that is sensitive to the individual, the unique, and the non-typical, and thus must bring ‘people’ back into history” (Berghahn & Lassig, 2004). There clearly is a need and a place for inquiry as a psychological grain of analysis in those fields—a grain of analysis that honors the singular subject in his/her biographical particularity and singular history of discursive and social constitution, articulated with other modes of analysis within a systemic, transdiciplinary frame of understanding of social processes.

THE POLITICS OF DISCIPLINARY AFFILIATIONS

The aim guiding this paper is to reclaim the psychological from the way in which it has historically been constructed in the disciplinary organization of knowledge. For the view of psychological inquiry discussed here, as one thread in a systemic, transdiciplinary investigation of social processes, as well as for other projects in theoretical psychology that fully engage with other disciplines, an unavoidable issue concerns the relation to psychology as a discipline. The issue has substantive, institutional and political dimensions, closely intertwined and inseparable.

The issue revolves in particular around the use of the term “psychological” at all. If, as critics such as Rose, Foucault, and others have emphasized, psychology has been complicit in the individualizing ontology that dominates modern thought, and if the broader aim is to reconceptualize the production of knowledge along transdiciplinary lines attuned to the systemic workings of the social order, why not rely on a different language for characterizing the kind of inquiry described here? If, however, part of the aim is to reconceive the notion of the psychological rather than abandon it to the way it has been historically and contingently constructed and to the politics of knowledge underlying that construction, it is essential to redeploy it under a new, systemic understanding.

The institutional correlate of this issue, of course, involves the issue of disciplinary affiliation. In her critical discussion of the relation between feminism and psychology, Wilson (1998) addresses an analogous tension. In analyzing the identity struggles of feminist psychology, Wilson describes the tensions—tensions attending any critical project—regarding its location vis-a-vis mainstream psychology, the problematic concerning the identity of psychology as a domain, and the stakes involved in either too strong or too tenuous a separation between feminism and psychology (roughly, ineffectiveness versus cooptation). Drawing on a deconstructive logic, she suggests that critique is inherently internal in the sense that “criticism is required to inhabit [the territory it critiques] even as it presses urgently for a breach in the configuration of that territory” and that “contamination is the condition of criticism in general” (p. 36). Thus, what matters is to inhabit well.

From another (converging) dialectical perspective, Wilson’s analysis captures well the contradictions entailed by any transformative project: one can only transform by working with these contradictions and tensions (Falmagne, 2000). The discipline of psychology is configured, undoubtedly, through the effect of historical and institutional forces both internal and external to the academy, but it is at the same time configured
through the kinds of knowledge production projects ongoingly and currently associated with it. If the aim is to redefine the study of psychological processes as one mode of analysis in a transdisciplinary, systemic frame of reference, there are both intellectual and pragmatic reasons for maintaining the disciplinary affiliation, even though this strategy appears to endorse on a concrete level the disciplinization of knowledge, while letting this kind of work, along with others, contribute to dissolving disciplinary boundaries—tensions are fertile and generative. It is, fundamentally, the substantive nature of the knowledge production project that is of primary importance.

REFERENCES

Chapter 12

The many faces of ‘relevance’: South African psychology in context

Wahbie Long

University of Cape Town, South Africa

SUMMARY

For three decades, South African psychology has had to front up to persistent charges of social “irrelevance” emanating from within its ranks. On the other hand, the difficulties that have arisen when attempting to clarify the notion of “relevance” have been equally well documented. This paper attempts to delineate the historical emergence, meanings and significances of “relevance” discourse in South African psychology. Accordingly, the corpus of material constituting the study consists of fifty-eight presidential, opening and keynote addresses delivered at annual congresses of South African psychological associations dating back to 1950. A thematic analysis of these speeches reveals three themes: the discipline’s longstanding preoccupation with its relationship to broader society, the correspondingly intractable opposition between basic and applied psychology, and a rise in systems thinking. The results suggest that the “relevance” debate in its past and present formulations leaves little space, paradoxically, for the concerns of South Africa’s black majority, in so doing compromising efforts towards the discipline’s meaningful transformation.

INTRODUCTION

At its national conference in 1994, South African psychology acknowledged its prior complicity with the apartheid regime (de la Rey & Ipser, 2004). Weighed down by a long and detailed involvement with racist ideology (Cooper et al., 1990; Duncan, 2001; Foster, 1991; Magwaza, 2001), the profession was forced to confront itself in a manner not unlike that of its very own patients. In the last years of the struggle for democracy, it was the profession’s largely indifferent response to human rights abuses of the day that hastened its denunciation as “irrelevant.” Yet, eighteen years into a new political dispensation, questions are still being asked about the “relevance” of psychology for the lives of the majority of South Africans (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Macleod, 2004; Mayekiso et al., 2004; Pillay & Siyothula, 2008).

In South Africa, disillusioned psychology students comment almost matter-of-factly on the unsuitability of their chosen profession for the national life. Slavish loyalty to Euro-American theories of human functioning, indifference towards the concerns of the black majority, absurdly high consultation fees in a poverty-stricken country, ongoing white domination of the profession—these are some of the criticisms with which the discipline has had to contend. Some question the commitment of mental health professionals to building a new and inclusive South African society and ask whether it is all mere “rhetoric” (Freeman, 1991; Stevens, 2001) and “political correctness” (Pillay & Siyothula, 2008). In the most recent issue of PsyTalk, a newsletter of the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA), the president revisits the “relevance”
debate and reiterates that “Psychology has a responsibility towards serving society” (Tlou, 2011, p. 3). Indeed, in its mission statement, PsySSA lists as one of its core values a commitment to what it calls “social relevance”: “We encourage a multiplicity of opinions and seek way [sic] to incorporate the voices and experiences of all communities and avenues of psychology” (PsySSA, 2011).

Like any discursive object, however, the term “relevance” has meant different things at different times (de la Rey & Ipser, 2004). In the 1980s, for instance, a time of increased protest against apartheid rule, “relevance” was typically invoked in the course of heated debates about the profession’s position on the pressing issue of political oppression. By contrast, since the dawn of democracy, its chief usages have been in relation to the racial demographic profile of the country’s psychologists as well as the profession’s response to post-apartheid policy directives. This is not to mention, of course, the phenomenon of the 1960s and 1970s, when searching questions circled around the “phenomenon” of European and American psychology, with particular reference to their scientific traditions.

This paper, then, is part of a larger study exploring the historical roots, meanings and significances of “relevance” discourse in South African psychology. Here, “relevance” is conceptualized rather broadly as a conversation within psychology, about psychology. One would imagine, therefore, such a conversation to be occasioned most naturally at psychology congresses. Accordingly, for the present investigation I decided to collect presidential, opening and keynote addresses delivered at annual psychology congresses in South Africa and analyze their contents.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

In this study, the data corpus consisted of fifty-eight addresses collected from various local and international sources: university libraries, branches of the national library, online journals, personal archives and the speakers themselves. Of the collected speeches, three could be sourced in summary form only, two in slide form, and one as an extensive revision of the original speech. Thirty-five addresses were delivered exclusively in English, twenty in Afrikaans, while a further three made use of both English and Afrikaans.

The earliest address was from 1950 and the latest, 2010. Specifically, nine addresses were from the 1950s, twelve from the 1960s, ten from the 1970s, thirteen from the 1980s, five from the 1990s, and the remaining nine from 2000 onwards. Eleven addresses were presented at congresses of the South African Psychological Association (SAPA), eighteen at congresses of the Psychological Institute of the Republic of South Africa (PIRSA), seven at joint SAPA/PIRSA congresses, five at congresses of the Psychological Association of South Africa (PASA), four at conferences of the Organisation for Appropriate Social Services in South Africa (OASSSA), two at Psychology and Apartheid Committee conferences, and eleven at PsySSA conferences.

Braun and Clarke’s (2006) five-phase model for thematic analysis was applied to the data corpus. The first phase—familiarization with the data—entailed repeated readings of the collected speeches and a search for patterns of meaning. In the second phase, initial codes were generated that accounted for the basic features of the data set. In the third phase, these codes—and all their data extracts—were organised into broader themes. The fourth phase involved the refinement of the thematic scheme while the fifth and final phase consisted of defining and naming themes.
RESULTS

The analysis produced three main themes. The first pertains to the relationship between psychology and broader South African society, the second to the phenomenon of declining individuality, and the third to the distinction between science and profession that characterizes the field of psychology. These themes are now explored in turn.

Psychology and South African society

In the West, the relationship between psychology and society is an intimate one, forged from the outset by a disciplinary tendency towards application, that is, the solution of practical—i.e., societal—problems; the extent of this inclination was such that it didn’t take long for practical psychology to supersede the marginally older academic psychology (Jansz, 2004). The pattern in South African psychology has been no different. Unsurprisingly, this relationship proved to be the single dominating feature of the entire data corpus. For reasons of simplification, I have divided this theme into two parts: the first deals with normative conceptions of the psychology-society relationship, while its counterpart consists in evaluations of the actual form that relationship is perceived to have taken.

1. The importance and role of psychology in South Africa

Addresses are riddled with various references to the role of the discipline in society and the latter’s reciprocal demand for psychological services. These references are moreover representative of the entire 60-year range of the data corpus. In this excerpt from the opening address at the 1953 SAPA congress, Eleanor Pratt-Yule—a trained psychoanalyst with an interest in animal experimentation—blames the “militant experimentalist” for the ongoing theoretical controversy within the association. From its humble beginnings, SAPA had been split not only along the pure/applied divide but also—and more or less correspondingly—between behaviourists and non-behaviourists:

Here in South Africa we are fond of stressing the immense complexity of the problems which face us as a multi-racial society. If we, as psychologists, are to play our proper constructive role in their solution, we cannot afford to spend much time on theoretical controversy, however much intellectual fun and stimulus we may undoubtedly derive from it. The problems which face us are indeed urgent, and it behoves us to be both liberal-minded and pragmatic in our approach to them.

Half a century later, after decades of political turmoil and eventual change, the same problem-centred sentiments of responsibility and urgency are expressed in this keynote address by Salim Badat—then chief executive officer of the Council on Higher Education—at the 2002 PsySSA congress:

We simply must not take our young democracy for granted for there is much yet to be done to make it work for all our fellow citizens. In the challenges that face us as a country, and as higher education academics and administrators and as professional psychologists, we must be able to respond, heads held high…
2. The failure of South African psychology

The sense of mission in the foregoing extracts is palpable. Yet that mission was—and is—frequently said to have failed. Criticisms of the discipline—in particular, its research tradition—predominate in addresses delivered during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, while denunciations of the profession appear to be more prominent from the 1980s onwards. In 1969, for instance, P.M. Robbertse—the PIRSA president and a noted apartheid ideologue—had this to say:

An analysis of current research projects in South African psychology leaves a person without any doubts. Too much of these bear no relationship to our national needs and the findings are frequently of such a nature that they hold no meaning for anyone other than the researcher. Research is frequently of a fragmentary nature, seldom forming aspects of a central topic. Research on a topic such as the sexual life of a scorpion is clearly a waste of manpower, especially when our country’s many human problems are taken into account. [translation]

In the opening address at the 2007 PsySSA congress, Boyce Mkhize—registrar of the Health Professions Council of South Africa—delivers a stinging attack on the profession:

This country has a bag full of apartheid wounds as revealed during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. No active follow-up was ever done to bring about true reconciliation and healing so that there would be closure to some of the gruesome revelations that our nation was exposed to. And so if you asked me, what is the state of the discipline, I would say, it is a quiet or silent discipline in the face of an evident national cry for oral and emotional catharsis.

Regardless of the psychological association in question, on balance, the data supports the conclusion that psychology—as science and profession—is widely believed to have failed its social mandate.

The eclipse of individuality

Jansz (2004) notes that two related developments have been of fundamental significance in the rise of practical psychology: individualization and social management. For the task at hand, individualization refers to “a number of changes in people’s “life-world,” in particular the shift from group to individual, the interest in individual differences, and a focus on the inner world of feelings” (p. 12). The surprising feature of these speeches, though, is that, far from evidencing an individualizing focus, they shed light, instead, on the alienating, paradoxically de-individualizing logic of capitalism, and the subsequent advent of systems thinking.

1. The critique of capitalism

In 1962, after much anguished handwringing, SAPA split on the issue of race membership. Apartheid law demanded, so the argument went, different psychological associations for different races, which led to the founding of the whites-only PIRSA. Reminiscent of the Anglo-Boer wars of the past, SAPA came to be seen as the disciplinary home for English-speaking liberals while PIRSA became the refuge of conservative Afrikaners. From this point onwards, PIRSA speeches are marked by
lamentations on the loss of individuality, laid squarely at the door of the alienating “robotism” of egalitarian, scientific and capitalistic (in some instances, communist) societies—hence, during the sixties and early seventies, PIRSA’s marked emphasis on such topics as giftedness, creativity, the religious personality and, notoriously, racial difference. From P.M. Robbertse’s presidential address of 1968:

It is indeed as if we can speak of a process of disintegration that is occurring in the Western world and that is largely attributable to the progress made in the field of technology and its ultimate expression in the splitting of the atom. The process of natural-scientification did not as expected make man freer, but on the contrary bound him tighter in slave chains so that he was eventually delivered up to his own handiwork. It’s no wonder that Schubart claims that the West has given to mankind the most well-considered forms of technology, state and commerce, but that it has robbed him of his soul… Man as a utilitarian being in the great machine of Robotism becomes an efficiency being that can be replaced by a new part if he is worn out. [translation]

The capitalist critique would continue well into the 1980s, which, in South Africa, were years of rising protest. Here, addressing himself to the deleterious effects of racial capitalism, the American anti-capitalist scholar and keynote speaker at the 1989 OASSSA national conference, Joel Kovel, made the following remarks:

In societies like South Africa and the United States, racism appears as a multiple alienation. Thus it occurs between two races, which do not recognise one another, and tend to go their separate ways. It occurs also between individuals of a given race, particularly the dominated race, so that we get enormous degrees of violence and crime carried out within the townships of South Africa and the urban ghettos of the United States… Finally, this alienation may be seen in the form of a person turning against him- or herself in various patterns of emotional disorder. Thus racism involves a triple degree of alienation—between races, between individuals of a dominated race, and within each person.

Whereas Robbertse locates capitalism and egalitarianism within the same ideological camp, the left-leaning OASSSA—or Kovel at least—holds that the capitalist order is guilty of perpetuating an oppressive social hierarchy. Both take issue with a single economic system, that is, but do so from opposing ends of the political spectrum. For PIRSA, capitalism and egalitarianism are united in their disregard for human uniqueness and, therefore, difference; for Kovel, difference itself is the problem. In both instances, however, the anti-capitalist fervour is situated in a broader context of widespread social protest: Robbertse after all is speaking in 1968—an iconic year of worldwide significance—while Kovel’s address occurs just months before mounting local and international pressure forces the apartheid government to release Nelson Mandela from prison.

2. The rise of systems thinking

The individual is now alienated. What, then, can take its place? Systems theory, of course, is an ideal candidate: with an overriding emphasis on extra-individual influences, the alienated and, therefore, “missing” individual will no longer be the first port of call. Coincidentally or not, references to systems theory start popping up in speeches from the early eighties. In a 1982 address, Gert Rademeyer—the first president of the racially integrated PASA—makes mention of
…the epistemological shift which we are currently experiencing in our discipline … and I am obviously referring to the advent and development of GENERAL SYSTEMS THEORY. [original emphasis]
At this point mental health is no longer theorized with reference to individual-specific factors but, rather, in relation to broader, shared social phenomena—apartheid in particular. Consistent with an increasingly prominent discourse about the varied spheres of influence on psychological wellbeing, approaches to intervention start changing too. Catch-phrases like interdisciplinarity, community psychology, Afrocentric psychology, primary health care, prevention and promotion, and social justice—each of which is indebted to systems thinking in one way or another—become, and remain, emblematic watchwords of the day. These shifts were only made possible, however, by a change in political fortune that, beginning in the mid-1970s, heralded the irreversible decline of the apartheid state. PIRSA itself was no longer able to justify its philosophy of racial separatism—it too had to think “systemically”—and ended up initiating the merger with SAPA. This momentous about-turn involved more than a simple desire for a smoother relationship with the newly-established Professional Board. PIRSA and, indeed, the broader discipline had no choice but to reconsider the modus operandi: it was neither possible nor expedient to ignore the dramatic political developments that were sweeping over the country.

The science versus the profession

In the opening address at the 1983 PASA congress, Ronald Albino—he had argued in the early sixties in favour of SAPA’s racial integration—makes the comment that

It is only in psychology that we tend to have sharp separation between the basic researcher and the applied researcher. And I believe the basic researchers are to be blamed for this for they have, in general, been working in a natural scientific paradigm that is quite inappropriate for dealing with the problems found by the applied psychologists concerned with persons in social situations. Often they have been dismissive of what they see as the unscientific fumblings of the applied practicalers.

A decade later, in the opening address at the PASA congress of 1993, Deo Strümpfer—a dissident Afrikaner psychologist—claims that the distinction between basic and applied psychology is best explained by reflecting on the differing traditions of psychology departments in English- and Afrikaans-language universities:

For a long time psychology at the Afrikaans universities was characterized by a strong service orientation. Heavy emphasis was put on applied subdisciplines, particularly clinical, counselling, industrial/organizational and educational psychology—all of those that became registration categories when South African psychology became professionalized… At the traditionally English universities there always was a heavy emphasis on basic, theoretical psychology and research publication has always been the norm for recognition. There was a certain ambivalence towards application, with clinical psychology for some time the only significant exception.

Considered as a whole, the corpus of speeches is indeed replete with such standout juxtapositions as: the distinction between the “science” and the “profession,” the dichotomy between “pure science” and “technology,” the differing needs of psychological “scientists” and “professionals,” the “theoretical” and “applied” aspects
of psychology, the “clinical-experimental” divide, the “academic” and the “practitioner,” “knowledge” and “skills.” But it is Strümpfer’s assertion that the most obvious fault-line in South African psychology has less to do with the traditional two-step model of science than with the politically-charged English-Afrikaner binary that warrants special attention.

Prior to World War Two, the tone of South African psychology was Euro-British; after the war, American predilections emerged the stronger. The post-war period saw also the institutionalization of Afrikaner apartheid rule and the increasing isolation of South African academia in continental Europe and Britain. It is therefore instructive that PIRSA presidential addresses frequently make reference to trends in American psychology and society, with the 1964 address on one occasion even pre-empting objections by justifying its focus on this “new American illness.” The Afrikaner “service orientation” would have dovetailed seamlessly with American pragmatism, revealing itself in PIRSA addresses in the shape of endless discussions about the professionalization of South African psychology that, prior to the 1983 SAPA-PIRSA merger, were conducted almost exclusively by PIRSA presidents. One influential—albeit essentialist—line of argument attributes the existence of this service ideal to the survivalist mentality of the Afrikaner nation (volk), built up over centuries of untold hardship (Giliomee, 2003); a more nuanced reading is that it owes much to the rise of Christian-National ideology (O’Meara, 1996). By contrast, English-language psychology departments were more interested in basic psychology, not because English-speaking liberals were indifferent to the social problems of the day but, rather, because they seemed to place their faith in science itself—that is, in “the hope that reasoned enquiry and patient persuasion would triumph over ‘ideology’… [in] an increasingly race-obsessed state” (Dubow, 2001, p. 116). At any rate, the interest group for professionalization was led by an Afrikaner-dominated university in Stellenbosch, while the rationale for this drive appears to have been based, again, on a social contract of sorts. Practical psychology was ostensibly in need of professionalization in order to protect the public and win its respect—while success on both counts would assure doubtless a steady stream of customers. The political impulse for statutory registration, meanwhile, was occasioned by the assassination of the Afrikaner supremacist, Hendrik Verwoerd, by a psychiatric patient; the activities of the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre that included the use of such psychological methods as T-group training to promote multiracialism; and a protracted investigation into Scientology. This relative emphasis on professional matters has continued into the post-apartheid era with the founding of PsySSA; in fact, in his 1996 presidential address Theo Veldsman declares that PsySSA is, in the first instance, a professional society.

**DISCUSSION**

More should be said regarding the first two themes, given the shared time-specific cleavage that characterizes them both. In the first theme, it was noted that criticisms of the discipline were largely confined to the decades before the 1980s, while condemnations of the profession were restricted mostly to the 1980s and later. In the second theme, what was being mourned in the decades leading up to the eighties was the loss of individuality, while the rise of systems thinking was evident from that decade onwards. The full significance of the eighties for South African psychology’s “relevance” debate, that is, requires some appreciation of context. During the seventies,
the Afrikaner-driven movement towards professionalization was beginning to reap tangible rewards, culminating in 1974 in the establishment of the first Professional Board of Psychology. On the political front, however, the promulgation of the Afrikaans Medium Decree in the same year set the tone for what would become the Soweto riots of 1976, completely unanticipated events that turned the course of South African history on its head. In 1978, the Afrikaner psychology association, PIRSA, in a clear intimation of a growing rapprochement between the two associations, backtracked on its separatist values by holding joint conferences with the racially integrated SAPA. All of which was happening, meanwhile, in the midst of considerable regional turmoil, particularly in Angola, Mozambique and Rhodesia (Lambley, 1980). The mid-seventies were years of change, therefore, not only in psychology but, indeed, the whole country and beyond, with especial implications for Afrikaner institutions. A definite shift in political momentum was afoot, epitomized by the failure of Calvinist individualism, mounting local and international condemnation of the systematic, wide-ranging depredations of apartheid rule, and the subsequent revolt against an Afrikaner-led profession.

It is worth revisiting one final matter: the mostly pre-1980s criticisms of academic psychology. Keeping in mind the distinctly pragmatic and theoretical orientations of “Afrikaner” and “English” psychology respectively, it becomes difficult to resist the conclusion that the “relevance” debate is just another tired iteration of English-Afrikaner antagonisms. It would appear that, for as long as the political dominance of the Afrikaners went unquestioned, English psychology was deemed irrelevant, but as soon as the once-impenetrable edifice of Afrikaner rule began to crumble, the Afrikaner profession seemed irrelevant. All the while, there remained this benevolent concern on both sides for the fate of the “Africans.” Post-apartheid, much of the talking continues to be done not by—but for—black Africans. It is true that many black psychologists now occupy positions of influence within the discipline, but it is, equally, an open secret that the historically white universities are still the powerhouses in South African psychology. When one considers the fact that, a generation after the fall of apartheid, the discipline continues to dither on most indicators of substantive transformation, one begins to wonder whether, perhaps, the “relevance” debate is not—and never has been—about the much-sought-after “majority of South Africans.” Perhaps it is just an echo reverberating through the land. And perhaps that is why the red herring we call “relevance” continues to elude us all.

REFERENCES


Chapter 13

Polyvocalism, emancipation, and sociohistoricism: Possibilities for a critical educational psychology

Stephen Vassallo
American University, United States of America

SUMMARY

Although the parent field of psychology has made strides in integrating critical perspectives, educational psychology is lagging behind. This lag is a concern because critical psychologists implicate the discourse of psychology in a number of unintended, negative consequences. Therefore, the infusion of psychology in everyday educational discourse warrants sustained and explicit critical attention to the research related to and the application of psychology in schools. Few have attempted to explicitly discuss the possibilities for what a critical educational psychology (CEP) perspective can look like. This paper is a starting point for the production of such possibilities. CEP is a commitment to examine widely held ideas, concepts, beliefs and methods in educational psychology through intra- and inter-disciplinary lenses in order to consider ways that our field is implicated in dynamic and subtle workings of power. As critical work within any field is not monolithic, three themes are discussed: polyvocalism, emancipation, and sociohistoricism. This conceptualization of a CEP is a key starting point for a dialogue on how we can push for, frame, and organize critical work within educational psychology.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Educational psychology is defined as any area of education that is informed by psychological theories or techniques (Bird, 1999). This definition points to a key characteristic of the field, namely the interdependence between education and psychology, and its subfields. These include, but are not limited to, developmental psychology, social psychology, ecological psychology, clinical psychology, and counseling psychology. In addition, educational psychology is a field that is informed by perspectives arguably outside of psychology, such as evolution, philosophy, and biology, to name a few. Educational psychology is a dynamic field from which to conduct inquiry. Notwithstanding, those within the field are often narrowly committed to certain assumptions, philosophies, methodologies, and conceptualizations (Bird, 1999; Gallagher, 2003; Martin, 2007; Sternberg, 2004; Sugarman, 2011).

Educational psychologists are committed to what Bird (1999) refers to as ideological individualism, which means a focus on the individual as both the problem and solution to social, economic, and educational problems. A central concern with this ideology is that individuals are viewed as the site of reformation, while environmental situations, such as interpersonal evaluations, asymmetrical social relationships, and diagnostic tools, are ignored. In this regard, ideological individualism contributes to deficit-based thinking (Bird, 1999; Corcoran, 2007). For example, consider Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Shifting the discourse away from individual pathology, theorists argue that technology, standards for effective teaching, neoliberal
requirements for efficiency and productivity, metaphors of learning, capitalism, and scientific instruments form the discourse of attention and give rise to a description called ADHD (Crary, 2001; Sugarman, 2011). From this historical moment, ADHD emerges as a problem—as a way to describe educational problems and sanction ways to address them. To address the “problem of attention” individuals can undergo cognitive training or be provided with medication. Teachers can also be the targets for interventions, as they may be expected to be dynamic, creative, and energetic so as to “capture” students’ attention.

Another concern is that a commitment to ideological individualism is underpinned by a narrow conception of self and personhood. Martin (2007) contends that the notions of humanistic and scientific selves implicitly and explicitly inform much of the work within contemporary educational psychology. The scientific self is rational, componental, and capable of self-knowledge and management. This self underpins the literature on self-regulation, metacognition, and self-concept. The humanistic self is defined by its uniqueness, private emotions, and experiences. It is a self that seeks its own development through self-expression. The scientific and humanistic selves pervade educational psychology discourse and underpin ideological individualism.

There are several concerns with these selves, which are rational, interior, isolated, self-interested, consumptive, and positioned as distinct from historical, institutional, and cultural contexts (Cushman, 1990; Gergen, 2009; Martin, 2007). In addition, these selves are treated as a priori, even among many educational psychologists who draw from sociocultural theory.

Some contemporary sociocultural theorists treat the self as a cultural artifact—a kind of understanding that emerges through and is constituted by biological, philosophical, cultural, and ideological configurations (e.g., Cushman, 1990; Martin, 2007; Sugarman, 2011). As these theorists suggest, without recognition of the constitutive nature of self it is difficult to forge meaningful communal involvements and participate meaningfully in the democratic process. Sugarman (2011) explains:

In understanding that we are formed within traditions and practices...we can begin to grasp how others may be constituted similarly, but within differing historical and sociocultural circumstances. With knowledge of how historical and sociocultural contingencies shape our beliefs, emotions, biases, choices, and actions, the assumptive background to our lives is cast in relief and can be put to personal and collective scrutiny. Similarly, with such knowledge we are more likely to engage openly and consider seriously differing conceptions and practices of personhood. (p. 30)

If educational psychologists fail to reflexively consider the kinds of selves inscribed implicitly and explicitly in their discourse, they can endorse a narrow sense of self that is self-interested, consumptive, communally disconnected, and solely responsible for life’s outcomes.

Other concerns related to educational psychology discourse are methodological. Validity is sought through an alignment with the natural sciences. Drawing this alignment supports efforts by educational psychologists to position their work as neutral, value-free, and ahistorical. Within the field, notions of child, adolescence, memory, development, and self, to name a few, are treated as natural concepts discovered through science, and divorced from politics, culture, and history. Of course, there are compelling analyses to the contrary (e.g., Besley, 2002; Burman, 2008b). However, they are not part of educational psychology conversations.
Another issue with the alignment to the natural sciences is that educational psychology tends to be informed by technical rationality, which is characterized by the logic of causality, control, and prediction (Gallagher, 2003). This logic is supported by efforts to conduct research that is valid, reliable, and generalizable. For example, in the area of self-regulated learning (SRL), Boekaerts, Maes and Karoly (2005) state:

…the greatest challenge for the coming decade is … to consolidate the conceptual, methodological, assessment-based, and interventional insights gathered across many disciplines … to achieve a greater sense of systemisation, generalisability, and, as already discussed, external validity. Moreover, the integration of the science and practice of self-regulation would take a giant step forward were we to seek greater clarification of our meanings and standardisation of our measurement and treatment procedures. (p. 307)

Those SRL researchers who draw on sociocultural theory in SRL also operate with these commitments. In 2002, a special edition of Educational Psychologist offers a diverse methodological and ontological perspective in order to “enrich” the current understanding of SRL (Perry, 2002, p. 1). This enrichment meant improving understanding of SRL by introducing qualitative measurementsthat capture SRL as actually enacted, as opposed to self-reported. Although it expands the methods used to study SRL, this work reflects a commitment to use scientific standards to empirically “improve” conceptualizations and pedagogical interventions.

The expansion of measurements, the consolidation of conceptualizations, and improvements in interventions are important objectives, but do not adequately support critical developments in the area of SRL. As Martin and McLellan (2008) argue, there is a great deal of ambiguity in scholarship on SRL and it is a mistake to believe a strict adherence to a narrow brand of empiricism is adequate to address this issue. Of course, Martin and McLellan (2008) recognize the importance and value of empirical work for conceptual development. However, in the case of SRL, which is tied to a number of complex and contested concepts, such as agency, autonomy, self, control, and metacognition, Martin and McLellan argue that the conventional perspectives and methods for empirical study are not adequate to sufficiently improve our understanding, nor are they adequate to push a critical agenda. Rather, what is needed is articulation of the philosophical, cultural, and historical roots that underpin ideas of self and personhood that inform SRL research.

The discourse of educational psychology tends to be normalizing, positivistic, ahistorical, and reductionist. Raising these concerns is not intended as a call to abandon the tools, methods, and conceptualizations of the field. Instead, the suggestion is to broaden our understanding by including diverse representations of concepts and methods, and situating them within particular historical, political, and cultural moments. Including alternative meanings, by using diverse perspectives and methods, supports the understanding of concepts rather than render them ambiguous and irrelevant.

**CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY**

Critical psychology (CP) is a perspective that has received more attention than CEP. CP is characterized by a commitment to understand and change institutional policies and practices that work to maintain the status quo (Fine & Burns, 2003; Fox, Prilleltensky & Austin, 2009; Osterkamp, 2009; Sampson, 2000; Tolman, 2009). Osterkamp (2009) writes, “Critical psychology sees its main concern as providing the conceptual tools
needed to recognize the societal reality of one’s own actions, both its structural/social preconditions and its involvement in concrete power-relations” (p. 167). Critical psychologists tend to believe that mainstream psychological practices and knowledge can contribute to the oppression and discrimination of individuals, especially for those who are not part of dominant groups. Therefore, researchers have discussed critical psychology in the context of disability (Prilleltensky, 2009), race (Durrheim, Hook & Riggs, 2009; Teo, 2009), class (Kincheloe, 1999b), and gender (Burman, 2008a), to name a few.

Although critical psychologists are concerned with the role that psychology plays in the reproduction of inequality, they tend to acknowledge that their own commitments are not without dangers. However, there is still a commitment to engage in the kinds of questioning that invites reflections on the ethical, philosophical, and practical implications of psychological inquiry. A commitment to CP does not guarantee the production of truth, or the development of awareness and action that can free individuals from the purported constraints of psychology and other circumstances. Rather, it invites a range of possibilities for practice and ethical considerations.

Critical work is present in a variety of subfields in psychology, which include, but are not limited to, developmental psychology (e.g., Burman, 2008b; Holzman, 1997), counseling psychology (e.g., Corcoran, 2007), social psychology (e.g., Parker & Shotter, 1990), and educational psychology (e.g., Gallagher, 2003; Kincheloe, 1999b; Martin & McLellan, 2008; Packer & Tappan, 2001; Sugarman, 2011). Although critical work does exist within educational psychology, the field is lagging behind. Consider that in the first and second editions of the text Critical Psychology: An Introduction, educational psychology is not featured. In 1999 Bird charged: “the field of educational psychology is in many ways one of the furthest from the critical project in psychology” (p. 22). Almost a decade later, Martin (2007) makes a similar observation as it relates to the burgeoning body of studies in educational psychology with the self- prefix. He states:

...it is surprising that relatively little attention has been paid to conceptualizing the kinds of self that are assumed in this body of scholarly work or to interpretations of the sociocultural and institutional contexts within which these conceptions have developed and flourished. The relative absence of such conceptual and interpretive work seems especially striking given the considerable attention that has been devoted to critical consideration and interpretation of psychologists’ self-related studies in other areas of psychology.

(p. 79)

In addition to lagging behind other fields, CEP seldom enters educational psychology conversations.

CRITICAL EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

The phrase CEP is seldom used, especially within academic camps, in the United States. I have encountered its usage in two scholarly publications (Bird, 1999; Gallagher, 2003); the phrase is not widespread or well known. Of course, the notion of critical does not have to be explicit in order for scholarship to count as such. However, it is argued that unlike the parent discipline and some of its subfields, critical engagement has not taken hold within the boundaries of the field. Overall, there has been little effort to expand, organize, and develop a body of scholarship that can be classified as CEP, and
there is an absence of scholarship dedicated to defining and demarcating it. However, Goodman (2008) and Kincheloe (1999b) have made strides in this area.

Kincheloe (1999b) has worked on a perspective called post-formal educational psychology, which is defined by a commitment to illuminate ways that the dominant discourse within educational psychology marginalizes, renders invisible, and silences diverse ways of knowing. This perspective emerged as a critique of educational psychology by introducing Paulo Freire’s work in conversations about the limitations of cognitive theory (Kincheloe, 1999b). Although this perspective is still focused on cognitive critiques (e.g., Malott, 2011), it has been used in other areas (e.g., Kincheloe & Horn, 2007), and is sometimes referred to as critical constructivism (Goodman, 2008; Kincheloe, 2005). This perspective is pioneering, and is an essential part of the critical landscape in educational psychology. However, adopting this label has the potential to narrow the critical scope because of the epistemological and ontological connotations related to the notion of constructivism. In addition, this perspective tends to be aligned with an emancipatory agenda informed by the neo-Marxist perspective of Paulo Freire. The conceptualization of CEP offered here encapsulates this perspective, but is not reducible to or definable by it. CEP does not necessarily align strictly with any political, economic, psychological, and philosophical rationality; for these reasons, the reliance on the constructivist label as an organizing critical perspective is problematic.

Taking up the aim of defining a perspective is an ethically and conceptually complex task. Any attempt to define a perspective has the danger of narrowing possibilities, producing normative prescriptions, and constraining the imagination. Consequently, defining CEP can contribute to the processes of inclusion and exclusion, actually competing with the aims and goals of critical work. As a way to mitigate the constraints of saying what something is, it makes sense to define CEP as what it is not—a negative definition. However, I am concerned that unless there is at least a starting point for imagining the possibilities of CEP it may be difficult to begin conversations with researchers and practitioners. Therefore, it is important to consider possibilities of a CEP, even though they may and should shift, transmogrify, and be contested.

Again, CEP is a commitment to examine widely held ideas, concepts, beliefs and methods in educational psychology through intra- and inter-disciplinary lenses in order to consider ways that our field is implicated in dynamic and subtle workings of power. As part of this conceptualization, there are three interconnected themes: polyvocalism, emancipation, and sociohistoricism. Polyvocalism involves pushing the boundaries of foundational concepts by integrating a variety of voices and representations. The second theme, which is in many ways aligned with the first, involves an explicit commitment to emancipatory change by way of reforming structures and conditions of oppression and discrimination. The third critical theme involves examining historical conditions that make certain ideas, practices, and concepts possible. Each theme contributes to a different focus on the production of ideas, concepts, methods, and practices related to educational psychology. Although critical commitments are not monolithic, there are some common threads that unite these themes. These include: (1) commitments to diverse perspectives; (2) critiques of dominant discourse; (3) skepticism towards universalism, neutrality and radical individualism; (4) concerns about inequality; and (5) ambivalence towards the scientific method.
Polyvocalism

Polyvocalism is characterized by the use of inter- and intra-disciplinary perspectives to highlight different meanings and representations of dominant, naturalized and taken-for-granted concepts and ideas. For example, in his critique of the *bounded self*, which is a foundational concept of many educational psychologists, Gergen (2009) draws on the feminist scholarship of Carol Gilligan, the social behaviorism of George H. Mead, the sociology of Erving Goffman, and the cultural psychology of Jerome Bruner, Jaan Valsiner and Lev Vygotsky, to name a few. Gergen challenges the idea that individuals have an isolated conscious, a psychological core, and a mind that is separable from people and places. The key method here is to draw from multiple perspectives to invite reflections on different ontological possibilities.

Polyvocality can also take the form of cultural research, which involves disrupting the dominant discourse by examining, both nationally and internationally, the different qualities of thinking, knowing and being. For example, Vassallo (2012) argues that the discourse related to self-regulated learning development and parent involvement endorses middle-class norms and rationalities, making it possible to silence, marginalize, and pathologize working-class parents. Kincheloe (1999a) advances a critique of intelligence by citing differences in what counts as such by working with individuals from diverse socioeconomic class backgrounds. He expresses concern that dominant ideas in educational psychology are representative of a particular population, and as a result exclude and render invisible diverse ways of knowing, doing and being. Kincheloe does not suggest abandoning the foundational ideas that have historically defined and contemporarily define the field. Instead, he views the role of critique in educational psychology as democratizing the discipline by considering multiple representations of ideas, concepts, and assumptions. A commitment to polyvocalism encourages reflections on positionality, value-judgments, knowledge production, and methodologies. Polyvocalism can be an important form of inquiry that supports teachers’ ability to differentiate instruction, be culturally responsive, and reflect on interactions between pedagogical environments and students.

Emanicipation

Commits to polyvocality can illuminate ways that educational psychology constructs are representative of a particular group, and, as a result, silence and render invisible certain ways of knowing, being and doing. These insights can lead to modifications of instructional environments that are more inclusive and inviting. Additionally, these insights can provide teachers with “knowledge” of their students, so they can monitor their students and intervene when necessary in culturally responsive ways. For example, by theorizing different qualities of intelligence, teachers may frame curricula in new ways or vary teaching strategies so that they connect their students to the content. Or, teachers can make an explicit effort to value and validate different forms of intelligence; they can be aware of different mindsets and accommodate their pedagogical practice accordingly. The key idea is that knowledge of individuals, culture, and pedagogical environments can provide practitioners with knowledge to shape their assessments, classrooms, and interactions in ways that are inclusive.

While these efforts may democratize the educational context, they may do little to challenge broad structures of inequality. Polyvocalism alone does not support an
emancipatory agenda. In fact, polyvocalism can support efforts to render individuals adaptable to schooling structures, which are rife with contradictions and asymmetrical power relations that can reproduce inequality. That is why Fox, Prilleltensky and Austin (2009) state that critical work in psychology is not just aimed at minor institutional reform. Instead, informed by Marxist and neo-Marxist notions of power, this theme of critical work is directed at understanding and reforming broad social structures that are responsible for oppression and unequal social orders. The emancipatory agenda is tied to a social justice agenda whereby disenfranchised groups work to change the conditions of their oppression. This critical theme characterizes post-formal educational psychology (Goodman, 2008; Kincheloe, 2005) and critical pedagogy (Freire, 2003). Many educational psychology scholars who operate with a critical commitment evoke an emancipatory agenda (e.g., Gallagher, 2003; Kincheloe, 2005; Packer & Tappan, 2001).

**Sociohistoricism**

Another theme of CEP involves not just commitments to diverse perspectives and emancipation from oppressive social orders. It is also defined by its commitment to illuminating the historical and cultural constitution of ideas that comprise the field, and the constitution and functioning of the field itself. Billig (2008) describes this commitment as “historical reflexivity” (p. 20). This work might involve emancipation and polyvocalism, but is not necessarily guided by those agendas. Researchers have engaged in historical reflexivity in the parent discipline of psychology (e.g., Billig, 2008; Danziger, 1990; Rose, 1999), and some of the sub-fields, such as developmental psychology (Bradley, 2005; Burman, 2008b), social psychology (Parker & Shotton, 1990) counseling psychology (Corcoran, 2007), and clinical psychology (Cushman, 1995; Rapley, 2004). Similar to polyvocalism, this theme has multiple interrelated strands.

In one line, theorists and researchers focus on the constitutive elements of social, cultural, and historical events (e.g., Kirschner & Martin, 2010). Though there are variations to constitutive sociocultural theory, Kirschner and Martin (2010) state that there is generalized commitment to the study of psychological processes and phenomena as relational and historical. Martin, Sugarman and Thompson’s (2003) work on agency is an excellent example of this line of thinking. Drawing from Ian Hacking, they argue that humans are psychological kinds, distinct from natural kinds, such as chemicals, rocks and horses. From beliefs, desires, reasons, imaginings, and memories of psychological kinds, they reason that humans are agents in that there is an interactivity with the world that enables them to be influenced by and influence meanings and categorizations generated from a particular historical and cultural moment.

There is another line that involves tracing the origins of psychological ideas and linking them to broader historical and ideological contexts. The aim of this work is to disrupt taken-for-granted and naturalized ideas by drawing intertextual links from historical, cultural and political moments. As noted earlier, Burman (2008b) and Besley (2002) conducted historical analyses of the notions of child and adolescence, respectively. They are not ontologically invalidating these concepts, but situating their emergence through carefully crafted intertextual links.
Another example of this line of reasoning can be seen in the work of Rose (1999). For example, Rose (1999) explores the ways in which the concepts, rules, authorities, procedures, and techniques of what he calls the “psy” disciplines, produce ways of speaking truths about the self: That is, given certain historical, political, social, cultural, and ideological conditions, certain truths can be formed and techniques can be developed that enable individuals to evaluate those truths. Borrowing from Michel Foucault, Rose refers to these discursive practices as regimes of truth. This perspective is concerned with understanding the conditions in which truth claims are made possible. Individuals operating with this commitment may be less interested in making claims about different expressions of SRL or intelligence. They may be less interested in making claims about the emancipatory or oppressive implications of educational psychological constructs as well. Their focus is on illuminating historical, philosophical, social and cultural conditions that make it possible and impossible to form certain truths.

CRITICAL POSSIBILITIES

As critical psychologists suggest, psychological discourse is not neutral, value-free, and ahistorical; it is tied to ideology, politics, culture, and history. Although the parent field of psychology and many of its subfields have a well-established critical component, educational psychology is lagging behind. This lag is of concern as psychological discourse is deeply embedded in education and, therefore, reaches teachers, students, and parents. Therefore, it is incumbent upon educational psychologists to make explicit efforts to situate their work and practice within the complex ideological web of education in order to invite broad ethical considerations about educational psychology discourse. A conceptualization of CEP was discussed as a starting point to support this effort. These themes of CEP are not mutually exclusive and can all be integrated into critical scholarship. While a definition of CEP is offered alongside critical themes, this perspective in no way represents a rigid representation of what CEP is or can be. Rather, the definition and framework laid out here reflects a particular organization that should be negotiated, interrogated, contested, and continuously developed.

REFERENCES


Chapter 14

Sciences of the living dead: Race, psychology, and epistemic pollution

Thomas Teo
York University, Canada

SUMMARY

After discussing the dialectic of the concept of race, it is suggested that disciplines that are still dealing with race should be understood as sciences of the living dead. Once a cultural-historical concept—one that has political-economic relevance—is established, it is difficult to get rid of it in academic as well as in public discourses. A concept, once thought dead, has returned and raised its head in several areas. Examples and reasons for the rebirth of the idea of race are provided. The role of psychology within the sciences of the living dead is discussed and its scientific-racist past is mentioned. It is argued that psychology should include dimensions of subjectivity in this context. On the background of psychological reflections, the concept of epistemic pollution is introduced, which is defined as the addition of harmful ideas to the mind at a rate faster than they can be stored in harmless ways. Consequences on how to work with and against epistemic pollution are discussed.

… a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people fixed, canonical and binding. (F. Nietzsche)

INTRODUCTION

The UNESCO (1950) “Statement by Experts on Race Problems” published in 1950 was signed by internationally leading anthropologists, among them, Claude Levi-Strauss and Ashley Montagu. In the aftermath of WWII the scientists stated that the biological fact of race needed to be distinguished from the myth of race (point 14), the latter to which they attributed the horrors committed in the name of race. Although the authors would have preferred the term ethnic group to race (point 6), they still divided mankind (sic!) into three major divisions: the Mongoloid Division, the Negroid Division, and the Caucasoid Division (point 7). Their intellectual move did not allow for the beheading of the concept of “race.” This strike was attempted nearly 50 years later.

In 1998, the American Anthropological Association (1998) famously released their statement on race. Based on evidence from genetic studies, especially the pioneering works of Lewontin (e.g., 1974), the Association (1998) proclaimed that “evidence from the analysis of genetics (e.g., DNA) indicates that most physical variation, about 94%, lies within so-called racial groups … This means that there is greater variation within ‘racial’ groups than between them” (p. 712). Deconstructing the biological meaning of race, the AAA argued that inequalities between what have been called races in the past
were cultural-historical. Many critical thinkers repeated the argument of “racism without races” in books, articles, and documentaries.

International leaders in genetics have called for the end of race: Cavalli-Sforza and Cavalli-Sforza (1995), pioneers of population genetics, suggested that “the idea of race in the human species serves no purpose” (p. 237). Francis Collins, chief of the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI), argued at the White House in 2000, in celebrating the completion of the human genome sequencing, that “the concept of race has no genetic or scientific basis.” His colleague, Craig Venter, president of Celera Genomics, added at a press conference in the same year that “race is not a scientific concept” (cited in DeSalle & Yudell, 2005, p. 83). Other leading geneticists proclaimed that the concept of race does not make sense when applied to humans. Yet, the shotgun blasts against race were insufficient. The living dead came back.

In the public, the concept of race never disappeared and neither social nor biological usages of the term were given up in everyday discourses. In addition, anthropologists, geneticists, and, indeed, philosophers have worked on the revival of the race concept. The philosopher Robin Andreasen (2000) proposed a cladistic (a classification based on common ancestry) concept of race in which she tried to reconcile biological with constructivist theories of race. A similar argument was made by the philosopher of science Philip Kitcher (2007) who concluded that “races are both biologically real and socially constructed” (p. 298), a position that is similar to Hacking’s (2005) ideas. Kitcher relied on the work by the geneticists Rosenberg et al. (2002) who argued in a widely cited study that statistical analyses of genotypes in a worldwide sample lead to clusters that corresponded with major geographic regions (we usually refer to them as races in everyday English language). However, Lewontin (2006) criticized the use of microsatellite DNA markers that focus precisely on group differences but not on the totality of genetic variation.

Beyond the sometimes very technical arguments developed by population geneticists, there are three “experiential” instances that provide fresh blood to the living dead (race): (a) The visible world of sports; (b) the revival of race in the medical fields; and (c) the commercialization and identity-making of genetic ancestry testing. I should mention that philosophers are not exempt from contributing “pollution” to this domain. Peter Loptson (2001), professor of philosophy at the University of Guelph (Ontario), who wrote an otherwise solid textbook on theories of human nature, proclaimed when it comes to athletics: “To affirm that blacks tend to be better basketball players than non-blacks, and that this is not primarily a matter of socialization or culture, is not racist. It is not racist in part because it is true” (p. 151). There is no space to deconstruct this idea on statistical, conceptual, or genetic grounds, including the assumptions that are involved in such statements. Even if this statement is highly underdetermined the message is clear: Sports tell us that race is real.

In academia, research, and in professional practice, race has experienced a revival in the health sciences. So-called ethnic diseases such as sickle cell anemia, Tay-Sachs disease, thalassemia, and cystic fibrosis have a long racialized history. Wailoo and Pemberton (2006) point out that the history of promise in genetic innovation in these diseases was interlaced with economic interests, personal and collective dreams, and identity politics. In 2005 the United States Food and Drug Administration licensed the racial drug BiDil, a heart medication for African Americans, after it failed in tests for the general population. Epstein (2007) emphasizes that no racially exclusive diseases exist and that such an endeavor should be labeled a form of “racial profiling” when it...
makes “use of group-based probabilities to make judgments about individual cases” (p. 215). Critics agree, and in the United States, the imagined or real advantages of race-based medicine fall short against the existing enormous health disparities between racialized groups.

Another food source for the “Zombie” of race (something that is assumed dead but is resurrected) is the commercial reality of genetic ancestry testing. A cheek swab and a credit card allow one to determine one’s haplogroup, telling a story about one’s ancestors. Spencer Wells (2006), working with National Geographic, which spearheaded one of these initiatives, rejects the racialized use of populations, but the racialized use of haplotypes coincides with “common sense.” Identity formations based on genetic markers are already promoted by webpages and even diets are recommended based on haplotype. Experts such as Bolnick et al. (2007) emphasize that “the assumptions and limitations of these tests make them less informative than many realize … [and] commercialization has led to misleading practices that reinforce misconceptions” (p. 399). Cultural ancestry would challenge such tests but notions of biological markers have more salient meanings than deconstructions or calls for careful interpretations of ancestry.

PSYCHOLOGY AND RACE

Not many psychologists have contributed significantly to these recent genetic discussions, although such genetic developments and their relevance to psychology have been discussed in special issues such as the American Psychologist (Genes, Race, and Psychology in the Genome Era, January 2005). The bulk of psychological work has contributed to existing psychological programs: Indeed, the tradition of scientific racism in psychology is alive and well. Rushton and Jensen (2005) were able to publish in American Psychological Association journals and discuss Thirty Years of Research on Race: Differences in Cognitive Ability. They concluded that the “Black-White IQ difference is partly heritable” (p. 278) and they argued that the “denial of any genetic component in human variation, including between groups, is not only poor science, it is likely to be injurious both to unique individuals and to the complex structure of societies” (p. 285). Certainly, human variation has a genetic component, yet, no data exist to determine that differences in mental life between groups are genetic (see Teo, 2011).

This type of research has had a significant impact in the public sphere, which is important for my argument. In 2010 the press reported that a school board member in Marysville (Washington State) had suggested to his colleagues that different racial groups display different academic achievements due to different brain sizes. According to The Seattle Times, the person wrote in an e-mail message that “east Asians and their descendants averaged larger brain size, higher intelligence and social organization than Anglo-Saxons and their descendants, and that Anglo-Saxons, in turn, averaged higher scores in those dimensions than did Africans and their descendants” (Flandro, 2010). The school board member contended that due to biological differences certain racial groups were incapable of achieving academic success and that they would explain the district’s achievement gap (Shaw, 2010). As publicized, the board member did not develop such justifications himself—his arguments were based on the research of Rushton.
On the other hand there have been studies in psychology that challenge the history and theory of race, and particularly the ideas and interpretations of scientific racism. Richards (1997) linked current race psychology with its precursors; Tucker (2002) identified the economic and political connections of race psychologists; Winston (2004) pointed to the close connection between psychology, race, and ideology, but also the opportunities that race has afforded. Most of the critical studies have been ignored in mainstream psychology, as are the many attempts at the deconstruction of race. Critical studies challenging concepts such as racial identifiers that are still widely used in psychology’s empirical works, such as “Caucasian” (e.g., Teo, 2009), are ignored in the discipline.

It should be mentioned that psychology has had a long tradition of prejudice research, culminating in the recent successes surrounding the research of the Implicit Association Test (e.g., Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998). Despite its enormously productive possibilities in terms of offering a conveyor belt for experimental studies and publications, the interpretation of test results is significantly underdetermined without in depth qualitative interviews and interpretations. The problem of underdetermination links to my work on epistemological violence (e.g., Teo, 2008, 2011) that focuses on the interpretation of data and shows that interpretations in terms of naturalized differences between racialized groups are not determined by the results, and that presenting such interpretations as knowledge is a form of violence against the Other. Of course, such arguments fall short against the resurrecive abilities of the living dead.

The question remains how psychologists can theorize race from a perspective that goes beyond the boundaries of psychology while having a psychological focus. There exist critical studies on race that would be useful in this context: Important theoretical work has been accomplished, for instance, with Hall’s (1996) studies on race as a floating signifier, in understanding race as a form of performance (e.g., Cooks & Simpson, 2007), and also within Whiteness Studies (e.g., Frankenberg, 1993). As valuable as these approaches are, they are not psychological in intent and the theoretical complexities make them difficult to understand for the general public. The living dead multiply at a significantly higher rate in comparison, and the few shotgun blasts directed towards them represent duds in the larger context, even when they hit the head of the living dead.

I have tried to link race to a science of the living dead for reasons of adding interest to the problem, but there is a serious theoretical ambition behind that goal. The question of whether race is in its essence real or not is probably not productive (I would argue that this is similar to whether God exists or not). What is important is that race is doing something and that race has become a social reality that shapes experiences, practices, and identities, culturally as well as individually. Race has become a social reality, rather than an empty signifier, and, if one is asked for an ontological position, I would use Baudrillard’s (e.g., 1993) concept of a hyperreality. Like religion, vampires, and zombies, races exist, because practices, experiences, and materialities of race exist. I would like to call approaches that study such phenomena, the Sciences of the Living Dead (and approaches that study those sciences, Metasciences of the Living Dead).

How can we think from a perspective of subjectivity about what this hyperreality does to subjectivity, and about the effects of race? I would like to introduce, provisionally, the notion of epistemic pollution. I borrow this concept from environmental studies, and intend to answer why it may provide a useful way of thinking about harmful ideas, particularly harmful ideas emerging from academia. Thus,
I am less interested in “my” neighbor’s pollution of a backyard, but rather in large-scale industrial pollution, the epistemic equivalent of which are academic institutions. We could call this process epistemic pollution from academia. It complements my ideas on epistemological violence, because I acknowledge that not all statements from academia on race are violent (Teo, 2008, 2011).

**EPISTEMIC POLLUTION**

There is not enough space to address the theoretical problems of importing concepts, models, theories, or metaphors from outside of psychology and using them in the field. But it should be mentioned that although metaphors can have a limiting function (we lose something when using them), they can also produce new possibilities for psychological reflection (see also Hesse, 1988). From the perspective of the object of research (the Other), racialized ideas can take the form of violence, whereby the researcher is the source of violence (Teo, 2008, 2011). Thus, from the standpoint of the object, pollution would be too narrow a term. From the perspective of a bystander, or a generalized “me,” or from a cultural or societal perspective, the result may be “bullshit,” and the process is epistemic pollution.

Although Frankfurt’s (1986/2005) studies on bullshit focused on public life, this concept can also be applied to the sciences of the living dead. A core feature of Frankfurt’s definition of bullshit is a lack of concern with truth. Yet, bullshit is not false but phony, a bullshitter is not a person that lies but rather bluff, and faking things does not mean that the bullshitter gets them wrong. The bullshitter misrepresents what he is up to. Scientists in the service of the tobacco industry come to mind (see Proctor & Schiebinger’s, 2007, program of agnotology). From the standpoint of a generalized subject, academic bullshit is a result of research that may lead to epistemic pollution, which is understood as a process of subjectivity.

Paraphrasing existing definitions in environmental studies (e.g., Pollution 2011), epistemic pollution can be defined as the addition of harmful ideas to the mind at a rate faster than they can be stored in some harmless way. If ideas do not influence belief systems or practices to the detriment of the Other, then it could be argued that those ideas have been stored in a harmless way. On the level of hyperreality, a zombie is a health hazard because a bite can turn you into a zombie yourself and, thus, Zombieland is polluted land.

Troubling ideas can easily be stored in harmless ways (e.g., ideas emerging from movies). The idea of a vampire can be stored in risk-free ways, although individual differences exist in how such ideas are understood or acted upon, based on specific experiences and exposures, on the background of culture and society. Whereas the idea of a vampire’s activities can lead to imaginative fascination in one person, the same idea can be harmful for the other, when behaviors found in fiction lead to abuses and even murder (“Vampire murders”). Besides taking into account individual differences, the amount of pollutants, and the time, extent, and selectivity of exposure to the pollutants are important. For instance, one may be exposed to a particular idea that is not harmful in itself, but over a long period of time, it may become harmful. Whether the idea can be stored in a harmless way also depends on existing preconditions. If the mind is already pre-polluted, then it may be difficult to remove any additional pollutants.

The distinction between fact and decision is not helpful in the case of epistemic pollution because of the hyperreality of the phenomena. A realist could make the
argument that what someone labels a harmful idea has a right to remain uncensored and
to be distributed when it is based on facts. My argument is that it is impossible to make
the distinction between fact and decision and that it is more important to look at the
effects of pollution. A seemingly non-contextualized fact such as “group A scores lower
on existing IQ tests than group B” still can have a polluting effect in a particular society.
The identification of possible harmful ideas would be the task of a teratology of
pollution, which is to a certain degree an empirical-normative project that enumerates
the types of pollutants and their effects.

Let me use a few examples of epistemic pollution from academia. A classical case
would be the emphasis within scientific racism that Blacks are inherently (even if
partially) inferior in intelligence to Whites. A huge amount of hyperreality goes into
such statements—but the effect is clear. For racialized Blacks such statements are forms
of epistemological violence, as they can be for bystanders and a generalized “me.” But
for bystanders they also represent processes of epistemic pollution. A recent example of
high-level pollution was the blog by the London School of Economics psychologist
Satoshi Kanazawa that was published and, after wide criticism, withdrawn by
Psychology Today. Its headline was “Why Black Women Are Less Physically
Attractive Than Other Women.” The rhetoric of “objectively less physically attractive”
that was used in the article, which mixed ratings with the rhetoric of objectivity,
rendered it a pollutant for a bystander.

Low-level forms of pollution are more difficult to identify. I would argue that an
item on a questionnaire that asks whether one believes that group A is less intelligent
than group B could be such a pollutant. Such an item may introduce an idea to a person
who has not been exposed to such ideas and it can have an impact if not enough
resistance has been built up against it. My argument is not that the agreement of a
person with such items is the problem to be looked at, but rather that the usage of such
questions by researchers should be the object of scrutiny. Introducing an idea, whether
the idea is previously known or unknown to the participant, can have a polluting effect,
either in terms of assumptions and behaviors, or in terms of supporting preconceived
notions. Even if a person has developed immunity against such pollutants, it has entered
the mind as an idea.

If researchers want to introduce prejudicial items to be rated, then they need to take
care of this pollution before and after their research has been conducted in order to
avoid harmful effects. Ideas emerging from academia have, due to their status, a certain
kind of power that is different from ideas emerging from the public (ideas from the
media would necessitate their own analyses). Although individual histories, horizons,
and differences and cultures may play a role in how possible pollutants are dealt with, I
do not want to exclude the polluter from responsibility. This means that the researcher
has the duty to make sure that possible harmful ideas are stored in “harmless” ways.

Even if one does not believe in a racialized idea, I suggest that we look differently at
persons who have been objects of harmful constructions. If I have a narrow horizon,
which is more prone to pollution, then I could integrate a particular idea into my
existing mental scheme on how to perceive the racialized world. This might be
particularly true in a context of racist and prejudiced constructions and practices of a
given society. It also impacts the identity and even health of the “Other,” and it might
restrict “my” possibilities of experience, as well as my relation to persons who hold
such views and my relation to the “objects” of such views. In an environment where
race is constantly invoked, meaning that heavy pollution already exists, small additional
amounts of pollution may lead to significant changes, in areas ranging from the performativity of race to mental health issues such as depression.

**COPING WITH EPISTEMIC POLLUTION**

Do we need to monitor epistemic pollution and regulate it? When it comes to environmental norms we find a backlash against critical assessments that would impact the interests and profits of corporations. The same happens in the context of regulating epistemic pollution. One could argue that hate speech legislation and various human rights commissions (e.g., in Ontario) have an implicit mandate to address epistemic violence and pollution. As is well known there is a huge backlash against such initiatives in certain circles of the public and media and it would be impossible at the moment to regulate the academic domain. Rather than addressing it as a regulative issue, I suggest dealing with it as a descriptive problem. It also means that we need to conduct empirical and interpretative studies on the sources and effects of epistemic pollution.

Avoiding epistemic pollution is impossible, and regulation is difficult; thus, the focus of reflection needs to be on coping with it. For example, the introduction of a wider horizon, or of a less dogmatic education, whether in religion or science, can have a beneficial effect on the mind. The notions of a liberal arts education and of critical thinking may implicitly be based on such ideas and may serve as tools to cope with epistemic pollutions. Yet, coping with epistemic pollution is an idealistic agenda given that our subjectivities are always embedded in more or less unequal societies that produce different forms of epistemic pollution. Dealing with epistemic pollution should not be restricted to the world of ideas and needs to be extended to the world of practices and performances.

Epistemic pollution has a normative connotation and thus it needs to be applied carefully. In the public political culture, right wing and conservative groups actually use this notion. Home-schooling, private religious schools, initiatives against sex education, and so on, are enacted as immunizations against a perceived liberal and secular agenda. Their adherents understand progressive or liberal cultural discourses as pollutions of the mind. My argument, however, would be that a rigid, selective, and narrow view of the human world prevents one from having the ability to dilute potentially polluting ideas within a broader horizon and to deal with epistemic pollution imposed by authority. Yet, I should admit that the concept of epistemic pollution involves theoretical problems, and careful analyses need to be conducted. On a psychological level the concept could rely on a neo-Herbertian notion of a dynamics of ideas as well as on current critical social theory.

Ideas can have a harmful effect on subjectivity, but I also believe that we can introduce ideas and practices to counteract this pollution. I suggest that embodied counter-practices that lead to new ideas are probably more important in order to develop resistance than carefully crafted critical studies. For example, the performance of hybridity could address a specific pollution. Whereas Black and White are established dichotomies within North American culture, and as such may have a polluting effect on the mind, this dichotomy will be less challenged by theories of hybridity than by practices that demonstrate that individuals may belong to both groups.

Whereas some multiracial persons invoke a single racialized identity (Halle Berry in her acceptance speech at the Academy Award Ceremony), others emphasize their dual ancestry. When President Barrack Obama went to Ireland in 2011 he claimed racialized
white ancestors from the region. This was an act of resilience in a context where he is constantly referred to as a “Black president.” Thus, it was not surprising that some commentators denied or ridiculed the notion of Irish ancestry—it did not fit into the idea of a “Black president.” I suggest that the very existence and performance of “marginality” can contribute to a deconstruction of epistemic pollution.

REFERENCES


Chapter 15

Peripheralization and the history of psychology: An example from Turkey

Sertan Batur
University of Vienna, Austria

SUMMARY

In peripheralized countries like Turkey modernity was not a bottom-up process developed through internal dynamics, but a process understood as “Westernization” and led by a political elite aiming to integrate the country with the world-system. Psychology in such countries takes on the task of the construction of a westernized subject, rather than of defining the subject under given conditions and contradictions of transition from “traditional” to “modern” society. This process has two main consequences: First, psychology is constituted in such countries as a result of a top-down process. Second, in order to construct the Westernized subject, mainstream psychology orients itself according to Western psychology. Instead of feeding itself from indigenous roots, it merely confines itself to Western knowledge. In this paper it is argued that the history of psychology in peripheralized countries should begin with an analysis of the peripheralization of both country and scientific discipline as dialectically interdependent processes. These processes determine the social function of psychology, its institutionalization and professionalization, as well as its particular characteristics.

PSYCHOLOGY, MODERNITY, AND MODERNIZATION

In recent years, thought around the multiple origins of psychology and its internationalization have been increasingly expressed within the historiography of psychology (Pickren & Rutherford, 2010; Pickren, 2010). While presentist and progressive interpretations of history writing usually have psychology start with Wilhelm Wundt’s laboratory in Leipzig and then bring it to the other side of Atlantic via Functionalism and Gestalt theories and finally to the present times, “new histories” of psychology argue that the history of social sciences cannot be constructed on a simple line. Historians of psychology increasingly agree that psychology has plural origins and that celebratory interpretations of its history serve various ideological functions.

This dialectical view of history coincides with the postcolonial situation: Understanding the indigeneity of psychology, the indigenization of American psychology as well as the dialectics of Americanization of psychology after World War II, provide us with some clues about the plural origins of psychology in ex-colonies (Danziger, 2006).

We know that modern European psychology was indigenized in North America and that “American psychology” was peripheralized especially after the Second World War and subsequently colonized other psychologies (see Bhatia, 2002). But we must remember that psychology gained currency in old oriental empires too, synchronously with the indigenization of American psychology. In the period between the two World Wars, psychology was expanding in modernizing oriental countries. In this regard we
can assess the institutionalization of psychology in Turkey, Iran and China during this period. The main question asked in this paper is why the same indigenization process which placed American psychology in the centre and peripheralized almost the whole of mainstream psychology in world was not possible in the old oriental empires despite their contemporaneity. I think Turkey can be a good example to answer this question, mainly for two reasons.

The first of these reasons is associated with relations between psychology, modernity and modernization. Steinar Kvale (1992) assessed that “psychology is the child of modernity.” Whether Foucaultian, which relates psychology to the emergence of the individual in the 18th century and with micro-power technologies which helps getting individual action under control; or whether Marxist, which relates psychology to new forms of capitalist productive relations, a relation between psychology and modernity is assumed in almost every approach in critical historiography (Jandl, 1999).

However, we should pay attention to Jürgen Habermas’ (1983) distinction between cultural modernity and capitalist technological modernization. This distinction provides some clues for understanding the histories of late modernized countries. We can assert that in a world dominated by imperialism, technological modernization doesn’t presuppose cultural modernity. Moreover, technological modernization in certain societies doesn’t immediately imply the modernization of all sectors of society. This process is manifested usually through the support of the modernization project by an elite segment in society while the other segments continue to live under traditional social structures and with traditional ways of thinking, despite developing capitalist relations. This very modernization process differentiates the old empires like Turkey, Iran and China from both Western European countries and traditional colonies.

The second reason why Turkey is “a good example” relates to the first. European expansion from the 15th century onwards brought about a new world order, which Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) refers to as a “world system.” Monetary fluctuations, caused by the European Expansion, dragged old empires like the Ottoman Empire into financial crisis and, in the long term, even into bankruptcy (see Pamuk, 2000). As a consequence of absolutism after the fall of feudalism, military modernization in Europe changed the power balance between European monarchies and traditional oriental empires. Politics of reformation, which aimed to bring armies of these empires to the modern technological level of Western Europe, started in the 18th century. But these reformation projects deteriorated the financial situation of the empires and made them depended on European capital. Therefore, these politics were accompanied by the process of peripheralization. While an expanding Europe colonized the rest of world, traditional empires—except Russia, a traditional empire that was incorporated into capitalist world economy due to its historical features as semi-periphery (Wallerstein 1974, pp. 300)—became half-colonies.

Typically, reform politics were projects of an elite group in state bureaucracies and they triggered negative reactions from traditional segments of society. Differences in modernization histories of traditional empires are mostly caused by powerful traditional and local feudal forces. At the beginning of the 19th century, local forces in the Ottoman Empire were mostly overwhelmed by centralized power. Thus, reform politics could be realized despite some interruptions.
PROJECT OF MODERNIZATION

The project of modernization forced the pace of peripheralization and made traditional empires both politically and financially more dependent upon central countries of the world system. The project of modernization in the periphery and the project of modernity in the centre have a few historical differences.

The first difference concerns the nature of the intelligentsia. As contrasted with the project of modernity, the project of modernization doesn’t represent the worldview of a new social class. The bourgeoisie in traditional empires was not yet formed as a social power when modernist ideas were introduced. They were mainly merchant bourgeoisie, dependent on Western capital, and very weak against traditional forces in society. Forerunners of modernization were not an intelligentsia as was the case in European countries, but were bureaucrats at different levels of state.

The second difference concerns the nature of social dynamics in oriental empires. Modernization in oriental empires was a top-down project without actual social dynamics. Typically, the modernizing elite were out of touch with larger segments of society. For example, the modernizing elite in the Ottoman Empire and the modernist republican elite in Turkey typically regarded people as uneducated, backward, and thus in need of the help of modernizers. Traditional forces have been depicted as ignorant by the modernizing elite. Therefore, the modernizing elite proclaimed itself as an avant-garde force with the motto “for the people, despite the people.” Actually, larger segments of society living under traditional structures have often reacted negatively to these elites. However, reformation politics were realized despite the people—if necessary with violence.

The third difference concerns the purpose of modernization. The European Enlightenment imagined an ideal world in which liberté, égalité et fraternité would be actualized. In contrast, the main goal of the modernizing elite in the traditional empires was to save the state. The motive of modernization projects in Turkey has been to save the state and to prevent a possible collapse of the bureaucratic power. Thus, the dream of the Ottoman modernizers was not necessarily an equal, free world, but a powerful central state which could maintain itself against the central countries. Although they demanded freedom and equality, they did so because of the belief that this could save the state. It is not surprising that modernizers, who tried to explain the negative reactions of people with ignorance or even betrayal, regarded equality and freedom as only conditional rights.

The fourth difference can be seen in the relationship between culture and technology. The main tension caused by the modernization project is arguably the relationship of cultural modernity with technological modernization. Although technological modernization was always accepted by the modernizing elite, cultural modernity was received with a certain resistance. Among the modernizing elite in Turkey, there were not only groups like the Kemalists who defined the central countries of the world system as “contemporary civilization” to which Turkey belonged, but also others who despised Western civilization and resisted it within the framework of other “modern” projects like pan-Islamism or pan-Turkism. The main line of the Kemalist group was radical Westernization politics, while the second group defended a politics of “getting technology from the West and protecting one's own culture against foreign influences.” They were particularly interested in modernization in Japan.
The fifth difference concerns the *contradictions of the project of Westernization*. The politics of Westernization has strongly dominated some periods of Turkish history. In particularly, Westernization politics in the later period of the Ottoman Empire between 1913 and 1918 and the early period of the Republic of Turkey between 1923 and 1950, determined the present situation in Turkey. Even institutionalization of psychology in Turkey occurred in this period. This was not just a coincidence. The main contradiction of Westernization politics was the attempt to realize the project of modernization from the top down without the support of the larger segments of society. The lifestyle of people was changed by top-down politics and violence, and so these politics have sometimes met with public resistance. Westernization politics were reduced to formalities such as dressing up like *modern people* or listening Western classical music on state radios. On the one hand, this situation caused hybrid ways of life; and on the other hand, it opened up an increasing gap between the modernizing elite and ordinary people. Through top-down politics of industrialization and etatism, modernizers tried to create a national industrial bourgeoisie. But this bourgeoisie, which was encouraged by state credits, subventions, economic speculations and even corruption, didn’t become really modern except for a few cases. Despite formal modernization, a broad cultural modernization in Turkey, following the European example, could not be really successful.

**Psychology as instrument of Westernization**

Psychology too formed part of the process of Westernization. The institutionalization of psychology in Turkey started with the suggestions of Western advisors who were invited to Turkey by the government to assess the modern education needs (e.g. Dewey, 1960). Particularly in the early years of the Turkish republic, modern education of people played an important role in Kemalist social politics. Kemalists radically reformed the education system. Turkish students were sent to Europe to study pedagogy. Egon Brunswik, the famous functionalist psychologist, was invited to Turkey. The first psychological laboratory of the republican period was established by him in the Gazi Institute of Pedagogy in Ankara.

After the university reforms of 1933, Kemalist Turkey extended an invitation to scholars who were dismissed from German universities because of their Jewish origins, their relationships with Jews, and for political reasons. The Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology at Istanbul University was established in 1937 (see Widmann, 1973). The first director of the institute was Wilhelm Peters, a German psychologist who previously founded the psychology department in Jena. The first studies of the Institute in Istanbul focused on measuring the IQ scores of Turkish children. By doing this, psychologists contributed to the standardization of the education system. Another aim of these studies was to compare Turkish children with European ones. Unsurprisingly, the results revealed that Turkish children were not significantly different from French children, and thus it was scientifically proven that there were no biological obstacles against Westernization and that Westernization politics were entirely feasible (Batur, 2002).

An interesting point here is that psychology remained until the 1980s a pure academic discipline. For example, the efficiency of labor power, which was one of the main concerns of mainstream psychology in industrialized countries, was not a subject of Turkish psychology for a long time. Clinical psychology similarly did not develop until the 1980s. Social psychological studies were mostly concerned with social change
and reformation politics. Psychology was regarded by governments as simply a part of educational reform. Therefore, it could be asserted that psychology, the child of modernity, functioned in Turkey as the child of the politics of modernizing elites. It was directly dependent on these politics and could survive as long as it was in service of them.

There are some typical consequences of this dependence. These consequences are characteristic of Turkish psychology and differentiate the history of psychology in Turkey from that of Western Europe or North America. On a superficial reading, we also can argue that these characteristics are not unique to Turkey. The histories of psychology in some other traditional empires show some similarities.

Top-down institutionalization and peripheralization

The first of these consequences is, contrary to West European and North American psychology, a top-down process of institutionalization. In the modern societies, institutionalization follows the attempts of a particular group of scholars. What happened in Turkey was quite the contrary. First, foreign advisors were invited and then, according their suggestions, government decided to create an Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology. After a political resolution of a council of ministers about establishing the Institute, the minister of education together with foreign advisors began to seek for suitable persons to work there. For example, Sabri Esat Siyavusgil, one of first assistant professors of the Institute had no formal education in psychology. He was appointed simply because he could read French very well and could translate psychological classics from this language. He translated important books of Jean Piaget into Turkish for the first time.

A typical result of top-down institutionalization is that psychology in Turkey became a peripheralized psychology dependent on psychology in the center. A lack of qualified academics required that students were sent to European countries and scholars from modernized countries were invited to Turkey. Consequently, only Western psychology was regarded as being scientific. Moreover, the ideal place for an important study to be published was a Western psychology journal. This situation became chronic with rapid Americanization in the 1950s. Even today, publishing in Turkish journals is not regarded as equal to publishing in English ones.

This situation harmed the development of scientific language. Even basic psychological terms were translated into Turkish in different ways by different translators. Moreover, translations from Western languages were unavoidably selective. This selectiveness facilitated an illusion of continuity in the history of psychology. Discussions on the “crisis of psychology,” which are as old as history of the discipline, were hardly reflected in Turkey. Thus, Western psychology, progressing on a line without ruptures and contradictions, gained scientific authority. New paradigms were regarded as scientific developments in the same progressive science.

Impossibility of indigenous psychologies and critical attempts

This dependence on Western psychology of course had some parallels with the admiration of the modernizing elite of the Western way of life. But there was no “the” Western way of life. European countries were plural, just like the discipline of psychology. This caused eclecticism in the modernization process. Kemalism contained
not only positivistic, but also romantic aspects. What had to be imported from modernized countries, and what was considered obsolete and unscientific, was determined by the needs of modernization politics. Thus, psychological projects that attempted to overstep the borders of educational reform and tried to use Western psychology to understand the subjects of the new social order in Turkey took a back seat during the first period of the history of Turkish psychology. In the 1930s and 1940s, two of the three chairs of the Institute for Pedagogy and Psychology in Istanbul, the chairs of Experimental Psychology and Pedagogy, conducted studies that could be meaningful for social politics, such as studies on IQ scores and characterology. The third chair, General Psychology, provided place for “human scientific” paradigms. Scholars of this chair attempted to develop psychological theories which had nationalistic emphases and claimed to elucidate social reality as a whole. These theories were derived from French positivist sociologists like Gabriel Tarde and Émile Durkheim and philosophers like Henri Bergson. The General Psychology scholars tried to interpret these French theories according to the Turkey reality and in this sense they sought to develop an “indigenous” psychology. But these attempts failed to impress the scientific society as well as politicians. With Americanization in the 1950s, the studies of this chair were openly condemned by younger scholars as old-fashioned and unscientific.

It can be argued that the dependency of psychology on the modernizing/Westernizing elite and its peripheralization prevented Turkish psychology to become indigenous. Instead, it took on a cosmopolitan character and steered clear of all social problems except the politics of the modernizing elite. For example, for a long time Turkish psychologists did not consider racism to be a Turkish problem that could elucidate the situation of minorities in Turkey, but instead a Western problem related to Afro-Americans.

Frankly, it can be questioned whether a psychology dealing with fundamental social problems was indeed practically possible at all. The claim of modernizing/Westernizing elite of being a “society without classes” and its corporatist character made the political system one that was closed to criticism (Batur & Aslitürk, 2006). In a system in which state directed capitalism had priorities that set it up against individual rights and freedoms, it is not surprising that opposing voices faced political oppression. A good example is the story of Muzafer Sherif. In a period during which racist forces were openly supported by the government under the influence of Nazi Germany, Muzafer Sherif took a political position. He wrote in anti-fascist journals and published a book, “Race Psychology” (Başoğlu, 1943), which condemned Pan-Turkism explicitly. He was arrested, and then left Turkey with support of his friends and an American scholarship. Because he married a non-Turkish woman in the US, he was dismissed from Ankara University and never returned to Turkey (Aslitürk & Cherry, 2003).

**Delay in professionalization**

The dependency of psychology on modernization politics meant its dependency on the state. One of the characteristics of Turkish psychology was that it remained for a long time merely an academic discipline supporting educational reform and teacher training, in line with how the modernizing elite conceived psychology. Psychological knowledge did not have any effects on everyday life, industry or the family, but remained a pure academic discipline. Psychology could only become a profession after the bureaucratic
elite lost its absolute power to new born bourgeoisie in the 1970s, years of rapid capitalization. It only became possible in the second half of 1970’s that private-sector and some public-sector organizations began supporting psycho-technical studies in order to raise the efficiency of working power. Psychological counseling did not become popular until liberal politics gave rise to the emergence of a new, rich and educated middle class in the 1990s. The emergence of this new social class facilitated, with its needs formed by the mass media, the existence of psychotherapy and counseling centers. Psychologists, for the first time in 1990s and following the introduction of neoliberal politics in 1980s, were now hired by human resources departments of companies or by kinder-gardens.

Even today, psychology is not yet a legally recognized and protected profession. The professionalization process of psychology is today an important subject on the agendas of psychological societies in Turkey. Dependency of psychology on the politics of modernizing elite caused practically delay in process of professionalization.

CONCLUSION

Since the 1970s, critically minded psychologists have criticized the hybrid nature of Turkish psychology, its alienation from society and the validity problems of universalistic assumptions (e.g. Vassaf, 1982). Today, the modernizing/Westernizing elite have mostly lost their ideological and political pillars. Emancipatory critical psychologies now attract more attention in the scientific community than ever before. As long as critical psychologists can stand up against the neoliberal ideologies and disciplinary regimes, they will have a better chance to understand and change social reality, and thus offer more than what peripheral mainstream psychology can offer people.

It is possible to get some important insights into the historiography of psychology from countries like Turkey, which joined to the world system from the periphery and within the formal structures of old empires. In researching the history of psychology in Europe, we understand that modernity has played a leading role. Similarly, the history of psychology in old empires should be approached with particular reference to their modernization politics. This critical relation of psychology with modernization in these countries is the most important factor in psychology’s history in the peripheral countries. The process of indigenization in these countries can only be understood within this context.

REFERENCES


Chapter 16

Problematizing the positive psychology of radical political theory

Mihalis Mentinis

University of Crete, Greece

SUMMARY

Alongside social constructionist psychologies that animate fluid and flexible subjectivities for the demands of late-capitalist production, positive psychologies, academic and popular, have undertaken the task to make sure that these subjectivities are also happy and joyous—as opposed to melancholic and grumpy—no matter what conditions they happen to live in. These positive psychologies function as psychic orthopaedics and produce and reproduce docile, albeit productive, subjectivities. Various kinds of positive psychology, emanating from various sources, are now evident in certain sectors of “radical” political theory and activism. In the current paper, I will examine two particular cases which I believe demonstrate the relationship between positive psychology and “radical” political theory. Firstly, I will look at Hardt and Negri’s (2010) emphasis on laughter and joy as demonstration of the power of resistance. Secondly, I will perform a reading of a widely circulated joke told by Slavoj Žižek, and show that, in contrast to its putative radical political message, a highly problematic relation to the ‘therapeutics of laughter’ operates in the joke and its meta-discourse.

THE SHIFT TO POSITIVE EMOTIONS

During the last decade or so there has been a gradual increase in emphases on positive emotions, which has achieved a hegemonic position in society. A number of professions (from psychologists to corporate coaches), institutions, theories, discourses and practices construct and reproduce a particular set of individualist ideas about the self, based on an upbeat, positive view of the individual, together with a parallel emphasis on the therapeutic powers of humour, sarcasm, and positive cognition and affect in general. The positive psychologies emanating out of this broad approach, and the repertoires of action they invite, vary from academic positive psychology to motivational speaking; and from self-help literature to various forms of “New Age” and esoteric systems, all intersecting with discourses of productivity, efficiency and competence. The names used to identify these approaches and techniques either resemble or are implicitly or explicitly related to mainstream (normally humanistic) psychological theories (e.g., “discovering the happy child inside us”) or employ esoteric jargon (e.g., “laughing yoga”). From the point of view of positive psychologies, everything related to positive emotions enjoys a privileged position and is uncritically seen as an intrinsically good thing. This is the world Michael Billig (2005) calls “ideological positivism”; the ideological hegemony of the positive and the ostracism of the so called negative emotions. Before unfolding the argument concerning the implication between positive psychologies and radical politics, and for our argument to be more comprehensive, it is
important to examine briefly some significant developments or nodal points in the
history of positive psychologies.

The first nodal point is the emergence of the culture of positive thinking in the US; a
culture which purged and exorcised (and continues to do so) all negativity, complaining,
pessimism, melancholy and scepticism in favour of an optimistic stance and an upbeat
position to life. Rubin (1994) and Ehrenreich (2009) trace the emergence of the culture
of positive thinking back to the extreme melancholy associated with puritan Calvinism.
In the 19th century New Thought was a religious trend that aimed precisely to transform
the puritan Calvinist negative introspective subjectivity into something positive.
Whereas the believer’s task before was to engage in a perpetual endoscopic search for
his sins, New Thought redefined the very meaning of sin as negative thoughts and
negative feelings as such. Being miserable was now a sin. Having melancholic thoughts
and believing one was not eligible for salvation were sinful in and of themselves. In
other words, the structure of the Calvinist subjectivity was maintained, but ones
religious duty was to engage in endoscopic search for negative thoughts and emotions,
and replace these with positive ones. Another important moment in the historical
development of positive psychologies is the mental hygiene movement which had a
widespread influence on American life from the early years of the 20th century through
the 1940s (see Becker & Marecek, 2008). This time the religious content was
abandoned and emphasis placed on the positive health of all citizens. The aim now was
the attainment of physical and mental health for all US citizens, the ideal of the perfect
adjustment to society through achievement of happiness and efficiency. Finally, we
should not fail to mention a set of ideas which can be traced back to Elton Mayo’s
famous experiments in Hawthorne, conducted from 1924 to 1927, which paid
unprecedented attention to emotional transactions. For Mayo, conflicts at work are not
to be seen as the product of class struggle but the result of lack of control over one’s
emotions. One of Mayo’s teachings, endlessly recycled by psychologists, was that anger
needed to be banished from the workplace and that emotional control was a
precondition for being a good manager and a good employee with prospects within a
company (Illouz, 2008). One’s self-control was to be manifested through an upbeat,
smiling, agreeable attitude, and enthusiasm. From the 1930s onwards, this notion of
self-control became the essential ingredient in guidebooks on successful management,
contributing to the formation of a work ethos—which we can now also detect in radical
political theory. Of course, all these ideas and practices have conditioned the emergence
of the so-called academic “positive psychology,” which is now the main institutional
technology through which ideological positivism is being reproduced and supplied with
“scientific” fuel.

To summarize, we can say that alongside social constructionist psychologies that
animate flexible and fluid subjectivities for the demands of capitalist production
(Parker, 2003; Kvale, 2003; Brinkmann, 2008)—as captured for example in the
increasing emphasis on individual resilience (Neocles, 2011) and the notion of
flexicurity in the labour market (see Crespo & Serrano, 2010)—positive psychologies
have undertaken the task to ensure that these subjectivities are also happy and joyous no
matter what conditions they happen to be in. Positive psychologies are first and
foremost a technology of production of subjectivities; of docile, obedient, albeit
functional and productive, subjectivities which are powered by an everlasting pursuit of
happiness—the promise of happiness as Ahmed (2010) puts it. Should we not start
worrying then when Hardt and Negri (2010) define the purpose of politics as the
“institution of happiness”? Is this not a sign of a kind of positive psychology penetrating radical politics?

There are now widely detectable signs of a dangerous transition in the “revolutionary” imperatives of contemporary radical political theory and practice. The commitment and sobriety of the old-school proletarian struggle now seem outdated, anachronistic, too rigid, too serious and dull for the demands of our times. Postmodern capitalism and positive psychologies seem to impose their own festive logic and aesthetic on resistance through repertoires of action which demand positivity of attitude and emotions, and humorous, ironic and comic posturing and positioning in social and political issues. Hand in glove with the spirit of the times, contemporary “radical” theory—at least certain aspects of it—and its activist counterpart—at least certain sectors of it—have abandoned and rendered unnecessary the commitment to long-term plans, distinctions between tactics and strategies, organisation, discipline, and radical combative political interventions, in favour of a joyous, comic, ironic immediacy that reverses, unhinges or subverts, it is argued, established hierarchies and relations of power. More and more “seriousness,” sobriety and combative actions are purged, banished, pushed out of the picture and seen as abject qualities related to the “business of domination,” the obscure world of money (e.g., Holloway, 2010). What I will do in the rest of this chapter is to look for the marks of positive psychologies on “radical” political theory and practice, and in turn outline the way the latter reproduce conservative forms of positive psychology. These are forms of psychology which are based on the reproduction of ideological and simplistic positive-negative dichotomous thinking.

THE BANISHMENT OF SERIOUSNESS

Hardt and Negri (2010) are indisputably two of the theorists whose emphasis on laughter and joy is highly problematic and seems to emerge from, and at the same time feed into, the ideology of positive psychologies (despite its assumed Spinozian origin). The way the importance of joy and laughter is formulated in their Commonwealth, deafeningly echoes a hegemonic moral order which is being configured and enhanced by the whole culture of positive thinking and its main academic technology, positive psychology:

In the face of this arrogance of power, the most adequate response, rather than lamenting our poor lot and wallowing in melancholy, is laughter. Laughing, mind you, is a very serious matter. It is not the consolation for our weakness but an expression of joy, a sign of our power. (p. 382)

Beyond the false choice between melancholy and joy to which we will come back, it is important to pay attention to the two different notions of power present in the above passage. On the one hand, power is equated with the arrogance of the state; a kind of Weberian power of the imposition of capital’s will upon the multitude. On the other hand, there is a psychologised, internal power which is about the individual’s capacity to control its negative emotions and turn them into positive ones. This latter notion of power, looming in the handbooks of positive psychology (e.g., Peterson, 2006) is by no means a collective one. If one is willing to detect here Negri’s (1999) distinction between power (potere) as possession and domination, and strength (Potenza) as desire and refusal, one will definitely be disappointed, since from the tone of the authors it becomes obvious that they address individuals and not collectivities—we will come
back to this too. With Elton Mayo’s experiments we referred to earlier, self-control became a precondition for a successful career within the American workplace, because it was considered a sign of the competent and efficient individual. Mastery and control of one’s emotions and the capacity to keep one’s emotions at bay were eventually defined by psychologists as a kind of moral fitness. This therapeutic definition of competence contributed to an understanding of power based on a person’s capacities. For psychologists, “real” power was now established not by imposing oneself on others, but by keeping one’s emotions in check, and by demonstrating this capacity through positivity of behaviour and attitude. It is this ethic of the successful employee—which brings together the control of emotions with personal success—what we find in and Hardt and Negri’s (2010) assertion that laughter is sign of our power.

If statements like the aforementioned are understood and make perfect sense, it is because what they convey is consonant with the dominant positive psy-web of meaning which holds that laughter is the appropriate reaction to hardship. This is perhaps why Hardt and Negri (2010) do not feel the need to further justify their statements. Neither any substantial theory of laughter, nor any elaborated argument as to why laughter is “the most adequate response” is required for their admonitions to be understood. But then we need to ask for whom laughter is the most adequate response? For if laughter were an expression of joy it would be a natural expression rather than an adequate response. Hardt and Negri’s call for laughter and joy, then, coincides with the contemporary positive psychologies’ demand for laughter and optimism as adequate and suitable responses to the adversities of life under capitalism. Hardt and Negri’s advice constitutes nothing but psychic orthopaedics, ensuring that under a radical rhetoric everything remains the same. Furthermore, the psychology they promote is consonant with the contemporary work ethic that demands optimism, enthusiasm, energetic stance, and a positive attitude. One needs to be able to control one’s melancholy, and one’s bad feelings, to be well adjusted in the dominant affective web of the capitalist production—even if one is a radical:

In the long battles against the institution that corrupt the common, such as the family, the corporation, and the nation, we will spill no end of tears, but still we laugh. And in the struggles against capitalist exploitation, the rule of property, and the destroyers of the common through public and private control, we will suffer terribly, but still we laugh with joy. They will be buried by laughter. (Hardt & Negri, 2010, p. 383).

Ehrenreich (2009) describes how this obsessive preoccupation with positive emotions runs through all aspects of life in contemporary US society. From breast cancer patients’ support groups to corporate management, and from self-help literature to religious groups and academic positive psychology, negativity, complaining, pessimism, melancholy, scepticism, anger, fury, all are exorcised as negative feelings that trammel one’s success in life—economic, sexual, spiritual, career, and family success. Furthermore, the hyper-optimistic political stance conveyed in the old Italian slogan “they will be buried by laughter,” very often reproduced by the contemporary pro-carnivalesque activists and theorist (see also Critchley, 1999), tends to obscure the fact that domination, authority, and subordination are often achieved, displayed and performed through a demand for happiness (Ahmed, 2010), as well as through humour, joking and laughter—in the workplace (Holmes, 2000), in relationships (Boxer & Cortès-Conde, 1997), and in state politics, as proven by figures such as Berlusconi,
Chavez and Ahmadinejad (Žižek, 2010)—and that so far it is the proletarians around the world that are being buried by capital’s laughter and joy.

Revolutionary and social movements around the world have always valued the importance of dissatisfaction over happiness, joy and cheerfulness. Mao Tse-Tung’s revolutionary brigades’ campaigns involved what was called “speak bitterness” meetings in which peasants were encouraged to speak about their grief and those who might have caused that grief. Paulo Freire’s method of conscientização (“conscientisation”), which was central to peasant liberation movements in Latin America, aimed to incite dissatisfaction among the oppressed. American feminist movements of the 1970s relied heavily on the instigation of anger that would spar women to political action (Becker & Marecek, 2008). And, to give a contemporary example, the Zapatista revolutionary psychology relies on an affective positioning they call “tender fury” (EZLN, 1995).

To return to a point we briefly touched upon earlier, Hardt and Negri (2010) take for granted the melancholy/sadness-happiness/laughter dichotomy, and they reproduce a conservative bourgeois positive psychology through a two-options choice of emotional positioning—between learned helplessness (“lamenting our poor lot and wallowing in melancholy”) and positive psychology (“laughing with joy”). Academic positive psychology is definitely the main institutional technology of the production and reproduction of this ideological distinction between positive feelings—associated with success, good health, power, etc.—and negative feelings—associated with economic failure, poor health, etc. It is not surprising that Martin Seligman, the very man who became first known for his research on “learned helplessness”—acting out this ideological distinction—is the same person who marked the turn of the American Psychological Association towards positive psychology and became one of its main gurus; a move from one extreme to the other, indeed. There is nothing else between or outside these two options of affective positioning, no other kind of revolutionary psychology to be constructed; everything collapses to the melancholy-joy dipole. Ignoring the politically productive qualities of the so-called negative emotions, Hardt and Negri promote a therapeutic psychology of emotional control that prepares the North American and European middle class activists for their adjustment to capitalist production; a capitalism-friendly militant multitude. Happiness is wrenched from its relation to the social conditions and becomes a matter of personal volition, of one’s conscious effort, a matter of attitude and cognition—just like in the equation of happiness found in positive psychology, according to which happiness is after all a matter of personal volition (see Seligman, 2002; Peterson, 2006).

THE APOLITICAL THERAPEUTICS OF LAUGHTER

Another case where we can witness the implication of a simplistic therapeutic positive psychology with radical politics is a joke (and the commentary that followed the joke) told by Žižek during his “what does it mean to be a revolutionary today” speech at Marxism 2009 in London. Žižek’s joke has been widely circulated on the internet in written and video form and has been welcome and celebrated for its putative revolutionary message. For that reason, I believe it deserves some more attention. The joke goes like this:

In the 15th century Russia occupied by Mongols, a farmer and his wife walk along a dusty country road. A Mongol warrior on a horse stops at their side and
tells the farmer that he will now rape his wife. He then adds, “but since there is a lot of dust on the ground you should hold my testicles while I am raping your wife so that they won’t get dirty.” After the Mongol finishes his job and rides away, the farmer starts to laugh and jump with joy. The surprised wife asks him: “how can you be jumping with joy when I was just brutally raped?” The farmer answers: “but I got him, his balls are full of dust.” (2009, YouTube video, timespan: 0:16-0:55) Having heard the joke the audience responds with laughter and strong applause. After all, as Speier (1975) points out, a joke is always a good way to make a point without receiving opposition. Perhaps one would be tempted here to turn Žižek’s joke against the pro-joy and laughter frenzy of Negri and Hardt (2010). The peasant suffers horribly, but he nevertheless laughs with joy. But Žižek’s joke is not an innocent one, and to employ it instrumentally would mean to obscure the politics of its workings. So let’s treat the joke seriously.

After telling the peasant joke, Žižek formulates its political morale and explains to the audience that the point for critical leftist today is not to “dust the testicles” of those in power, but to “cut them off.” The audience laughs and applauds once again. Žižek concludes that this does not necessarily have to happen in a radical way; it can be achieved with “smaller measures,” with “proper ideological struggle.” We have no recourse but to agree. And we are justified to think that the indigenous Zapatista peasant movement is an example of such “small measures” radical action. Let’s keep this in mind! Attempting to pre-empt possible reactions (even if tacit ones) concerning the employment of a cruel and tendentious joke, Žižek tells the audience that he thought well in advance whether to use the joke or not, and claims that in reality the joke does not make fun of the raped woman. On the contrary, he argues emphatically, “[the joke is] a critique of the dusting the balls politics of the so-called progressive intellectual [who] in order to score his small narcissistic point ‘oh I dusted the balls,’ totally ignores the suffering there” (YouTube video, timespan: 3:40-4:00). Perhaps one would expect some kind of Bergsonian (2011) argument that the comic demands something like a temporary anaesthesia of the heart, or something to that effect, but Žižek gives nothing of that. Instead, he prefers to hastily offer an apolitical therapeutics of humour looming in the milieu of positive psychologies. Let’s examine Žižek’s joke more carefully with reference to the distinction between the psychological function of a joke and its social psychological or sociological consequences. As Billig (2005) argues, those who laugh often might imagine that they are daringly challenging the status quo and in their meta-discourse of laughter they might claim to occupy a position of rebelliousness. However, the psychological function of a joke might differ significantly from its social consequences, which might be conformist, conservative, and disciplinary. Now, what is happening in Žižek’s joke and its meta-discourse/commentary is really interesting. Žižek’s joke and its meta-discourse have a kind of rebellious psychological function, for they allow the audience to position themselves on the side of radical politics, disapproving as ineffective and ridiculous the carnivalesque micro-resistance of the peasant—without, at the same time, having to worry about the rape of the woman. The broader political consequences of the joke and the therapeutic commentary that follows, however, are not rebellious at all.

Despite the fact that the audience’s laughter can be strongly criticised on a number of points, it, however, takes place on a political ground—that of the futility of the peasant’s resistance. Žižek knows, however, that this particular political ground is not a
stable one at all—it has been corroded by the suffering of the raped woman and the humiliation of the peasant, both in the story (as victims of the Mongol warrior’s aggression) and in reality (due the audience’s laughter). What Žižek needs, in order to stabilise the function of his joke within his talk, is to build a firmer ground for it, and he does this by lifting the audience’s laughter off its corroded but nonetheless political ground, and rescuing it by embedding it into the socially firmer ground of a positive psychology, of a therapeutics of the “smile or die” variant. He claims that speaking with women in Sarajevo who had been raped during the war he was told that the only way for them to cope was not by turning themselves into victims, but by turning their predicament into a dirty joke, and emphatically urges the audience: “YES, this is what you should do” (laugh).

There are a lot of interesting things taking place in this particular joke and Žižek’s meta-discourse about it. First of all, Žižek reproduces another version of the ideological positivist distinctions we saw earlier in relation to Negri and Hardt (and Martin Seligman). Here the distinction takes the form of victimhood vs. laughter—as if there is nothing else between victimhood and laughter, as if the inability to laugh out a difficult moment inevitably condemns a person to victimhood. Furthermore, we need to question seriously Žižek’s synthetic personalisation that brings together the women of Sarajevo with his London audience. Urging the audience “yes this is what you should do” (laugh) Žižek not only constructs the audience as a unified whole—a move similar to Hardt and Negri’s “we”—but he also blurs the difference between that particular audience and the women of Sarajevo. Turning suffering into a dirty joke may be an effective way for the raped women of Sarajevo to cope with suffering, but it is not clear at all why an audience that has nothing to do with the raped women of Sarajevo, and that was found outside the condition of the suffering of those women, needed the “dirty” joke. Why did that particular audience need therapeutic laughter; for what suffering? Why, according to Žižek’s prompting, should they laugh? All of a sudden, “we” all, the audience, become victims and we are free of guilt to enjoy dirty, tendentious, racist, or any type of jokes dressed up in the garb of a positive psychological therapeutics of laughter. To understand Žižek’s politically problematic therapeutic commentary on the peasant joke, we should ask whether he would tell the same joke to an audience composed of raped women. Only by asking this question do we re-establish the difference between Žižek’s audience and the raped women of Sarajevo; a difference buried by laughter indeed. We need to consider also, as Billig (2005) argues, that the same joke told by different people can have different consequences. When members of the same group, let’s say the raped women of Sarajevo, tell a joke about their rape, they know that certain limits of meaning are in place. This does not mean that they would enjoy it if somebody else, a man, a soldier, a rapist, told the same joke. The outsider is somehow in a different position in relation to the joke; his laughter is seen as intrusive, obtrusive, and hostile.

Beyond the microsociological aspects of the joke, namely the speaker-audience dynamic, we need to consider more carefully its content. If we take at face value the therapeutics of humour Žižek advocates, then why not see the peasant’s proclamation, “I got him, his balls are full of dust,” as turning into a joke his and his wife’s suffering; a kind of humoristic subversion of his predicament similar to the one Žižek attributes to the raped women of Sarajevo? In other words, and given the particular commentary Žižek provides, the joke can easily slip into the carnivalesque logic he has rejected. Indeed, the point is not, as I said in the beginning of this section, to turn the joke against Hardt and Negri, but to see that the joke together with Žižek’s commentary is in total
agreement with their logic: no matter how much the peasant suffers he laughs and dances, he does not resort to victimhood but turns his predicament into a dirty joke, “I got him, his balls are full of dust.”

But if we take Žižek’s rejection of the peasant politics as ineffective for granted, are not the therapeutics of humour he reproduces politically ineffective too? Of course we can understand the peasant’s reaction on several grounds. Throughout history peasants have devised various forms of micro-resistance in the face of oppression and exploitation (see Scott, 1990), and to impose simplistically our own standards of resistance on them would mean to ignore their experience and life conditions. After all, had the peasant in the joke reacted violently against the Mongol warrior, he would probably have been killed on the spot. Is it a heroic “suicide” we demand from the peasant, so that we do not laugh at him? Žižek, notwithstanding the contradictions in his argument, is reassuring here; this does not have to happen in a radical way. It can be achieved through “small measures,” through proper “ideological struggle.” It is here we can come back to the point we mentioned earlier in relation to the Zapatistas. In Chiapas—like in many other places in the world—the rape of indigenous peasant women in front of their family members by paramilitaries and soldiers in order to punish and bend political involvement with the Zapatistas is not a thing of history or a joke, but a very recent memory. There are, however, no therapeutics of humour here, no dirty jokes alleviating suffering, no ideological distinction between victimhood and laughter. Instead, the indigenous predicament is turned into determination for struggle—armed struggle, political organisation, commitment to the Zapatista cause. Their “small measures” in order to “cut the balls of capitalism” amounts to being part of the struggle in the mountains of Chiapas and fighting for different social and political relations. Even if one does not consider the Zapatistas a “genuinely” revolutionary or a radical enough movement, one should definitely accept that they do much more than jumping up and down with joy in the face of power’s attack.

One would, then, expect Žižek to see the Zapatistas at least as a “small measure” ideological struggle; and to see in the ski-mask of subcomandante Marcos someone who did something more than simply “scoring his small narcissistic point.” This is not the case though. For whether the peasant engages in ironic, carnivalesque resistance as in the joke, or takes up arms and organises autonomously as the Zapatistas did, Žižek seems determined to treat him with derision, and entertain his Western, middle class academic audience at the peasant’s expense. Clearly, supporting the politics of taking state-power, and contradicting the smaller measures political morale of his joke, Žižek (e.g. 2007) adopts a “humoristic” position towards the Zapatista peasants and Marcos, detecting in them a comic political posturing—because of their refusal to take state power—and he dubs Marcos a subcomediante (“sub-comedian”). The audience finds (in various occasions) the pun funny and responds with strong laughter. To add insult to all this, Žižek misattributes the subcomediante pun to Mexican Leftists, obscuring, or simply ignoring, the fact that this particular play on words was invented and employed in various occasions after the Zapatista insurrection by the extreme right-wing popular media in Mexico (e.g. Fuentes, 1996), which seemed to have taken very seriously the Italian slogan, una risata vi seppellira, so often reproduced by leftists. Demonstrating the conservative function laughter can have, what they really aimed to do was to “bury in laughter” the Zapatista project.
REFERENCES


THEORIZING NEW SOCIETAL CONDITIONS
Chapter 17

Deconstructing immigration in the UK: Discourses on sameness and otherness

Ilana Mountian

Post-doctoral Researcher at the Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil and Honorary Research Fellow at Manchester Metropolitan University, England

SUMMARY

In this paper I analyze discourses around immigration in the UK available in contemporary mainstream media. These discourses locate the immigrant as the “other,” producing dichotomist discursive positions of the immigrant, which often oscillate between that of “victim” and “threat.” This discursive position is considered within a specific social, political and historical context, in which gender, race and class play a crucial role. The analysis offered in this chapter, based on my previous research, draws on critical theories, psychoanalysis, feminist and queer studies and post-colonial studies. I highlight the position of the immigrant as the “other” in discourse, (re)producing particular effects, and point out some aspects of gender within this field. Further, I discuss the main public policies towards “celebration of the other” and the “politics of sameness,” questioning how in both approaches the immigrant is continuously reified in the position of the “other” in discourse. In conclusion I argue for alternative approaches in this field.

SOCIAL IMAGINARY OF THE IMMIGRANT

In this paper I highlight some discourses around asylum seekers and immigrants in the UK and question the position these subjects come to occupy in discourse. These discourses are part of the social imaginary around the asylum seeker. The notion of the social imaginary employed here is also seen as an analytical framework, which includes elements that, although appearing as fluid in discourse, (re)produce subjective positions (Mountian, 2009).

The notion of the social imaginary is elaborated from the Imaginary order of Lacan (1989) and the Social Imaginary of Castoriadis (1991). It makes explicit the performative character of discourse, establishes discourse as constitutive of subjectivity, and narrates the metaphor of the mirror stage (Lacan, 1989) and its connection to the Symbolic and Real dimensions. Thus, the subject is essentially social, and the gestalt of the image is founded on an illusion of completeness, misrecognition. Here dreams, ideas, phantasy, image, and speech, are taken as constitutive of subjectivity. This makes explicit the performative character of a multitude of discourses.

Public discourse has emphasized the undesirable quality of the immigrant, which was somehow colluded in the signifier “asylum seeker.” Asylum seeker, at times, came to be used in public discourse as synonymous to any form of immigration (including EU migrants). Tait (2004) highlights the media’s narrative on asylum seekers whereby specific words were seen utilized with frequency: “burden,” “bogus,” “arrest,” “disorder,” “conflict with police,” “infection,” “threat,” “cash in hand,” “profitable
conspiracy,” “criminal masterminds,” “forged documents,” “begging,” “language deficits,” “cheap labor,” “deception in NHS and welfare system,” “terrorism”. It is relevant to signal how “immigration,” “race,” and “terrorism” were linked in these discourses.

These discourses on asylum seekers locate these subjects in specific social-political structures, reifying a specific imaginary of the immigrant, that of the “other.” Hayes (2004) argues that this negative image of asylum seekers contributed to justify their unequal treatment.

It is relevant to point out the first immigration act in the UK, the Aliens Act. This Act concerned Jewish people fleeing Polish and Russian pogroms. Cohen (2001) highlights however, that this Act applied in fact only to the poorest ones, not to those seating on the first or second class travel facilities. Here discourses on the social cost of Jewish refugees were utilized, which in fact has some resonance with current discourses on asylum seekers. So support was given to those who could improve British economy and not to those likely to use the welfare (Cohen, 2001).

**CITIZENSHIP**

It is within a domain of powerful signifiers that asylum seekers stand; where, not having citizenship, state or nation, they are placed in the borderland. Asylum seekers concern people who are applying for refugee status. Refugee according to the United Nations Convention on Refugees (1951), 1967 Protocol Article 1A (2), is any person who owing to a well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (UNHCR, 1996, p. 16, as cited in Siddiqui, Ismail, & Allen, 2008, p. 46)

It is relevant to highlight that since citizenship is defined by borders, citizens are those who are part of the nation state. In other words, asylum seekers are placed in the “shadowlands” (McMaster, 2003, p. 1); they “do not belong,” they are positioned at the margins, without access to employment and recourse to service provisions.

However, citizenship is associated with the guarantee of basic human rights for its citizens. In this conceptualization, because asylum seekers are not citizens yet, they do not have, paradoxically, their human rights guaranteed. As Spybey (1996, p. 169, as cited in McMaster, 2003, p. 7) points out: “the nation-state and the nation-state system have rendered citizenship a universal requirement for the legal sanction of human existence; a stateless person does not exist in legal terms.”

Badiou (2001) critically analyses how ethics have become commonly restrained to the domain of human rights, and assuming that there is a kind of natural right, such as the right to live, to avoid abusive treatment, and enjoy freedom. These rights are taken as self-evident and are the result of a wide consensus. In this way, Badiou argues that “ethics” [has become] “a matter of busying ourselves with these rights, of making sure that they are respected” (p. 4). In his critique of this use of “ethics” Badiou argues that there are no ethics in general; rather, there are “ethical processes by which we treat the possibilities of a situation” (p.16).
So in this sense, two aspects are highlighted here: First, there is no attempt to place asylum seekers in a “victim” position, but rather to question approaches to asylum seekers. Second, it is crucial to identify the specificity, the ethical processes, of the socio-political contexts in which asylum seekers are placed.

In this sense, these images of asylum seekers are fundamental to understand current policies and the rise of particular claims, reinforced by the return of the signifiers “citizenship,” “law,” “state,” and “nation.” As Ahmed (2000, p. 78) posits when discussing the construction of strangers as those who leave home (where the migrant is seen as a stranger): “In such a construction, the strangers are the ones who, in leaving the home of their nation, are the bodies out of place in the everyday world they inhabit, and in the communities in which they come to live.”

Identifying these elements of the social imaginary around the immigrant is crucial to clarify the discursive position of the migrant. I want to interrogate two main aspects here: the location of the asylum seeker as the “other” and debates around this “other” as a fetishized other having specific functions in discourse.

**FETISH AND THE RACIALIZED OTHER**

While Freud developed a theory of fetishism in relation to sexual perversions (rather than hysteria), he also considered that love involves a certain level of fetishism. Freud (1977) argues that the fetish only becomes pathological when it “becomes the sole sexual object” (p.67). In 1908 Freud argued that the fetish stands for the missing penis of the woman. The fetish replaces the woman’s (mother) penis, which the boy believed in but does not want to give up. The boy cannot accept this fact for the fear of castration. Therefore, his belief in the woman’s phallus has been altered, “he has retained the belief, but he has also given it up” (Freud, 1977, p. 353). There is here, in other words, a disavowal. The woman’s penis is substituted, and the fetish comes to work as a defense.

Lacan (1995) highlights the ambiguity of the relationship of the fetishist, in which the castration of the woman is at the same time affirmed and negated. If there is a fetish, it is because she did not lose the phallus, but at the same time she can lose it. Fetishism would then function as a repudiation of castration. Lacan (1995, p. 157), elaborating on the fetish as a symbol, points out that “what is loved in the object of love is something that is beyond (mais além). This something is nothing, indeed, but has this characteristic of being there symbolically” (translated from Portuguese by the author). Lacan (1995) introduces here the notion of the veil, in which the veil as lack functions as something to be projected on; something imagined.

“The object of the fetish will be the witness, the veil of the castrated sexual organ—of the lack in the field of the Other” (Green, 1989, p. 16). There is here a fundamental illusion in relationships. With the introduction of the veil, the object is located outside (para além). So in this sense, the fetish-object provokes a “separation” between the subject and the object.

Elaborating on the relationship between fetishism and the symbolic position the immigrant comes to occupy in discourse, it is relevant to highlight McClintock’s (1995) discussion on how the fetish operated in relation to colonization and modernity. The fetish was “taking form in the context of an emerging global economy, mediating the unsteady traffic in goods and symbols” (p. 186). During the 18th century,
The fetish-lands of Africa embodied a necessary universe of errors against which the Enlightenment could measure its stately progress: errors of logic, of analytical reasoning, of aesthetic judgement, of economic progress and of political legitimacy. (McClintock, 1995, p. 187) Fetishism, in this sense, was related to conflicts of “cultural” values, whereby Europeans could frame what was not familiar, according what was different a negative value, and thus representing this world as deviant, undervalued and negated. In this way, fetishism provided space for the Enlightenment, creating the boundaries for what was modern. The encounter with the “other” produced both “them” and “us.”

GENDER, RACE AND CULTURE

Within this analysis of fetishism, discourses on race and culture are seen as crucial to the debate of the asylum seeker as a fetishized Other. Race, gender and culture are fluid constructions and vary according to different socio-political contexts; however, it is in terms of the historical fixity of some specific “others” that discourses on race and culture are (re)produced as having specific functions, e.g., in this paper on discourses of asylum seekers in the UK. This understanding is fundamental for the analysis of “race” and “culture” and the biopolitical economy.

Thus, in this sense, race refers here to regimes of difference, it produces specific others, socially-politically located, produced and reproduced throughout history. Racism summed up by Balibar (2002, pp. 17-18) is a true “total social phenomenon”—[it] inscribes itself in practices (forms of violence, contempt, intolerance, humiliation and exploitation), in discourses and representations which are so many intellectual elaborations of the phantasm of prophylaxis or segregation (the need to purify the social body, to preserve “one’s own” or “our” identity from all forms of mixing, interbreeding or invasion) and which are articulated around stigmata of otherness (name, skin colour, religious practices).”

Further, Balibar (2002) questions new forms of racism, more specifically on how “culture” functions here:

It’s a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but “only” the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions, in short, it is what P.A. Taguieff has rightly called *a differentialist racism*. (p. 21)

In this sense, it is possible to question how race and culture are placed and utilized in discourse. In fact, Žižek (1998, p. 168) comments:

Without the real of jouissance, the Other remains ultimately a fiction, a purely symbolic subject of strategic reasoning exemplified in the “rational choice theory.” For that reason, one is even tempted to replace the term “multiculturalism” with “multiracism”: Multiculturalism suspends the traumatic kernel of the Other, reducing it to an aseptic folklorist entity.

Žižek (1998, p. 168) carries on by quoting Michaels (1992, pp. 682-685): “Our sense of culture is characteristically meant to displace race, but ... culture has turned out to be a way of continuing rather than repudiating racial thought.”
These are crucial aspects, as race and culture are terms used in particular way, and in this sense, it is possible to see the discursive replacement of race by culture, keeping the same regime of difference, in this case, that of reiterating specific positions of the “other.” These, at the intersections with gender, produce further effects. Here, two aspects are highlighted, on the one hand, we can conceptualize the immigrant as “feminized” in discourse, while on the other hand, specificities of gender, and particularly regarding women and sexual minorities are seen as chief for an analysis of power relations within migration (and how fetishism works in this context).

**SOME ASPECTS OF GENDER AND MIGRATION**

Within these discourses, women are seen to be occupying a particular position; at this intersection, gender commonly figures as fetishized, naturalized and/or invisible within media and lay discourses and in public policies.

Regarding specifically public policies on immigration, the claim here is that gender has to be taken into account for asylum seeking processes—a number of research studies (e.g., Siddique et al., 2008) have pointed out the difficulties of claiming asylum based on gender violence—as well as to women’s access to services.

Concerning women’s access to health services, firstly, it is important to highlight the pathologized presence of asylum seekers and refugees in health care services, as exceptional circumstances (war, famine, settlement) can be mistaken as essential characteristics of the “other.” Here, for example, depression is often normalized as a cultural trait. In the case of women, previous research pointed out a concern regarding over prescriptions of antidepressants (Dawson, 2003; Mountian, 2005).

Moreover, from previous research (Mountian, 2005, 2008), it was noted that a number of issues concerning women are important to mention, such as: aspects regarding access to language, excessive use of tranquilizers, and gender violence (including domestic violence).

In relation to domestic and sexual violence, the Women Refugee Council Report (2010) points out that Refugee women are more affected by violence against women than the female population in the world, and highlights concerns regarding the lack of protection in their countries and in the country of asylum (in this case, the UK), as well as in their return. The report concludes that there are a significant number of refugee women in the UK who have experienced violence, including rape or sexual violence, “war rape,” also by smugglers, and are at risk of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The main objective of this paper was to raise some questions around the discursive location of the “asylum seeker” and to reflect on this position as a fetishized Other; and crucially, also raising the importance of gender in the analysis of the fetishization of the other. The identification of the asylum seeker as a fetishized Other refers to the symbolic position of the stranger. Although pointing to the self-evident character of difference (Badiou, 2001), it also speaks about the specificity of this Other—the immigrant—pointing to the need for considering the historical and political locations of the immigrant, and highlighting how discourses on race and culture are constructed and re-enacted within these locations. Thus, as Ahmed (2000, p. 79) points out, understanding the migrant as the stranger is not enough because it does not account for
the complexities of the histories, “not only for the displacement of peoples, but the
demarcation of places and spaces of belonging.” Ahmed instead points to the
importance of looking at “historical determinations of patterns of estrangement” (p. 79)
without assuming an ontology of the stranger.

It is relevant to highlight how policies on “sameness and difference” have been
employed in discourse. Discourses on multiculturalism highlight a “celebration of the
other,” we are all different; while politics of sameness point out that we are all equal.
Here we can ask: what is the position that the “other” occupy in both constructions?

Badiou’s (2001) argument on the self-evident character of human difference signals
two main questions that are important to highlight; first, on the position of the victim;
and second, on that of the other as a “good” other. Within the debate on the notion of
“difference” and “right to difference,” Badiou (2001) argues that the ethics of human
rights seem to define an identity and, in this way, the respect for the different applies to
those who are “reasonably consistent with this identity” (p. 24). In this way, Badiou
(2001, p. 24) concludes: “the celebrated ‘other’ is acceptable only if he is a good other
(which is to say what, exactly, if not the same as us?)”.

This is an important point, as public debates often oscillate between the celebration
of otherness and a politics of sameness, both strategies that risk obscuring the political
context and actual social struggles while keeping the immigrant (or the asylum seeker)
occupying a reified position.

Thus it is crucial to identify the symbolic position of the asylum seeker in discourse,
and how gender intersects within this; how they are produced and re-produced within
social and political structures and left oscillating in public discourses between positions
of the victim, exotic, or threat; being frequently reified in the fetishized position of the
Other.

REFERENCES

Balibar, E. (2002). “Is there a ‘Neo-Racism’?” In E, Balibar & I. Wallerstein (Eds.), Race, nation,
class: Ambiguous identities (pp. 17-28). London: Verso
University Press.
Penguin Books
Hayes & B. Humphries (Eds.), Social work, immigration and asylum: Debates, dilemmas and
ethical issues for social work and social care practice (pp. 11-29). London: Jessica Kingsley
Publishers.
Routledge.


Chapter 18

Capitalism and discontent in Mexico’s drug war

David Pavón-Cuéllar & Mario Orozco-Guzmán

Universidad Michoacana, Mexico

SUMMARY

Capitalism is conceived as a cultural formation that involves, essentially, a specific form of discontent. This conception finds inspiration in both Lacan’s reduction of capitalism to a symbolic system that constitutes culture, and Freud’s proposal that culture is not only based on discontent, but actually produces it. One way of generating discontent is to create needs whose satisfaction can never be truly fulfilling. One example of such a need is drug-dependency, which, at least today, can only be unsatisfied through a drug war that entails an additional discontent. This latter discontent is analysed here in the context of the subculture that has developed in Mexico to meet the demand for drugs in the United States. It is argued that this need, and the demand it generates, cannot be explained if we fail to consider the global context of capitalist culture and local drug-dealing and trafficking subcultures.

DRUGS, CAPITALISM AND PSYCHOLOGY

Demand for illicit drugs in the USA and the supply routes that traverse Mexico operate in the context of a capitalist system, a situation that, clearly, has psychological effects on all those involved. Drug users despair over the price of the substances they crave, dealers think of narcotics only as a source of profit, while large-scale traffickers compete ruthlessly for market share. Some are distressed by prices, others by profit-seeking, still others by distribution or circulation in the markets where drugs circulate, and everybody by the money associated with drugs.

The fact that drugs have become a market commodity has psychological effects on people, as does the economic logic upon which purchasing, dealing and trafficking drugs rests. Through its internal logic, the capitalist system exerts effects on the psyche. These psychological consequences are not caused primarily by any phenomenon of a genuinely psychological nature, for their origin is economic, political and historical; what we may call “meta-psychological,” since they transcend the psychological spheres of action, motivation, experience, cognition and consciousness.

We conceive capitalism as a meta-psychological system. This means that it not only transcends the psychological sphere, but embraces it and is intimately related to it through the effects it generates. For instance, the money connected with drugs may give rise to certain thoughts, feelings and behaviours in dealers. All these psychological phenomena should be explainable through the meta-psychology of capitalism.

But how are we to conceive the capitalist system in order to explain what occurs in the psychological sphere? Of course, if it is to be convincing, this explanation must be based upon some patent connection between the explanandum and the explanans (Hempel & Oppenheim, 1948). Now, in order to make it possible to perceive this connection between the psychological sphere that is to be explained and the explicative
capitalist system, how are we to conceive this system? Our answer is to turn to the Lacanian conception of *capitalism as a symbolic system*, i.e., a signifying structure, a language that may circumstantially constitute the meta-psychological exteriority of the unconscious and determine what happens in the psychological sphere of consciousness. This conception can be pieced together from various conceptual junctures in Lacan’s theory: first, his definition of “money” as “a signifier” with the idea that “economy” and “capitalist society” are dependent on “the signifier” (Lacan, 1999, p. 37; 1991, p. 105); second, a reading of Marx that understands “capitalism” as consisting in “signifying relations” and obeying a “signifying dialectic” (1958-1959); third, the idea that Marx was a “structuralist” who “uncovered” that which is “latent” in “capitalism”; that is, the “structure,” the “Other’s field” of “discourse” (2006, pp. 16-19); and, finally, the representation of “capitalism” as a “language,” an “unconscious knowledge” that “causes” and “exploits” consciousness (2006, pp. 34-65, 208-209; 2001a, pp. 424-434).

In describing capitalism as “a language,” Lacan portrays it as a “meta-psychological” system, a “symbolic system” of “the unconscious” that “commands” the “imaginary realm” of “consciousness”, which is the sphere of “psychology” (Lacan, 1998, pp. 224-259; 2001b, pp. 61-77). In this conceptualization, the psychological sphere is subordinated to the capitalist meta-psychological system, such that capitalism governs psychology. This is why, according to Lacan (1964-1965), psychology can only indicate “the way a human being can behave within the capitalist structure.”

Lacan regards the structure of capitalism as a signifying structure, capital as a signifier, and capitalism as language. Hence he also regards capitalism as culture, since “culture,” in Lacanian terms, is nothing more than “language” (Lacan, 1976-1977). The signifiers of language are the constituent elements of culture, and every “culture” has a “signifying constitution” (Lacan, 1961-1962). Our culture, for example, has the signifying constitution of capitalism, which is a cultural formation. The symbolic system of culture embraces the capitalist system.

**CULTURE, DISCONTENT AND WORK**

If capitalism is culture, then we may apply the Freudian analysis of culture to capitalism. Like culture—according to Freud—capitalism would involve something that we can describe as *discontent* (*Unbehagen* in German, which also means pain, discomfort, uneasiness or annoyance). Discontent would be not only an incidental problem or a contingent epiphenomenon of capitalism but, rather, the very structural foundation of the capitalist system, just as it is the basis of culture in Freud.

In the Freudian perspective, “culture is built upon drive renunciation” and “based on non-satisfaction” (Freud, 1996a, p. 96). *Culture rests on its discontent*. From a Lacanian point of view, we would say that every “system” of culture, as a “field of discourse”, depends on the fact that we renounce “the real” of “enjoyment” (*jouissance*), which must be “excluded” from “the symbolic” (Lacan, 2006, pp. 17-19, 327).

The “renunciation of enjoyment” defines precisely the concept of “work” or “labour” (*travail*) found in Lacan (2006, p. 17). In a certain sense, what distinguishes labour from leisure activities is *a cost*, a renunciation of enjoyment, a recognizable discontent that appears as a laborious or arduous aspect—i.e., trouble or effort, discomfort, or even a kind of pain or suffering—which accounts for the fact that one is usually paid, remunerated, or compensated for one’s labour. We may then understand that the French word for work or labour, *travail*, derives from the Latin *tripalium*, an
instrument of torture. In some way, we must be tortured, or renounce the enjoyment of life, in order for our life to be used as a labour power.

When “exploitation” of the use value of our life as a labour power occurs, there is also “discontent” (Lacan, 2006, pp. 364-369), because we renounce the “enjoyment” of “life” that Lacan reduces to an “undead drive” (Žižek, 2009, p. 121). In this view, the Freudian assertion that “culture is built upon drive renunciation” (Freud, 1996a, p. 96) is equivalent to another Freudian statement: the one which affirms that “every culture rests on a compulsion to work” (1996b, p. 7). Obligatory work is compulsory drive renunciation. Instead of enjoying a drive, we must make work of culture, of language, of the unconscious (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2010). This work of the symbolic system is a labour of symbolization, de-realization, renunciation of the real enjoyment of the drive and, therefore, of life itself (Lacan, 2006). Without this renunciation, neither symbolization nor a symbolic system of culture can exist. This is the reason why culture entails discontent, and why capitalism, as a culture, entails a specific form of discontent.

**CONSUMING DRUGS**

Discontent is inherent to capitalism, just as it is to every other cultural formation. By the same token, culture offers what Freud (1996a) calls “sedatives,” such as “intoxicating substances, which make us insensitive” to discontent (p. 75). But drugs also enable us to “break away” from the “outer world” of culture, and it is “this property” that “constitutes the danger and injuriousness of intoxicating substances” (p. 78).

According to Freud, drugs are harmful because they free us from culture. Yet this effect of escaping from culture is inseparable from that of escaping from the discontent that is inherent to culture. When we cease to renounce the real of enjoyment, we must renounce the symbolic system of culture: we have to abandon this system for it holds no place for the enjoyment provided by drugs.

To live the experience of the real of drugs, we must leave the symbolic of culture, which excludes the real. But “it is impossible to leave” the “symbolic order,” because this system is a “universe,” and there is nothing “outside” it (Lacan, 2001b, pp. 47-48). When we attempt to leave it, we are not really leaving it at all. We always remain in that same system from which the drugs are removing us.

Perhaps drugs are considered so harmful because they make possible that which remains impossible. They offer us an “impossible” real of “enjoyment” that “confines us,” inevitably, “to suffering” (Lacan, 2009, p. 108). Enjoyment can only be suffered; it can never be accomplished. It can only be sought time and time again. It becomes addictive, turning into an eternal need whose satisfaction can never be truly satisfying.

Drugs cannot truly satisfy the deeper desire to escape from culture and its discontent. So satisfying the need for drugs, through which we intend to satisfy this desire, cannot be truly satisfying. The unsatisfying satisfaction of the need for drugs still pertains to the discontent inherent to culture. Instead of escaping, drug addicts sink ever deeper into culture and its discontent. In reality, the need for drugs is a cultural need, just as its unsatisfaction is a cultural discontent. For instance, in capitalist culture, the need for drugs is retroactively determined by a demand for drugs articulated by the symbolic system.

The un-satisfaction of the need for drugs may be compared to the un-satisfaction of the need for other commodities, such as films or videogames, which also plunge us deeper into capitalist culture while apparently taking us out of it. But it is this culture and its discontent that reflexively create the need for such commodities. Therefore this
is a need of the very symbolic system of capitalist culture. The system logically needs these effective resources in order to keep us within it, and so impose itself upon us, all the while safely un-satisfying our dangerous desire to escape from it.

In a Lacanian perspective, our desire to escape from the symbolic system is caused by the real that is expelled by the system, the real of renounced enjoyment, which is the rejected object that Lacan identifies as the objet petit a. This object of desire is what drugs promise us and, ultimately, what addicts yearn for. Lacan (2006) describes it as a real “surplus-enjoyment” (plus-de-jour) that is “produced” negatively through its exclusion from the symbolic system of culture (pp. 17-19).

The system can only include a surplus-value, a surplus of symbolic value, by excluding the real surplus-enjoyment, the recovery of which will then be offered in the form of intoxicating substances. But these substances cannot recover that which is expelled by the system. Indeed, far from achieving that, drugs function as chemical devices of a symbolic system that can only enrich itself at the expense of the real. Thus, in the Marxian perspective, the symbolic world of money, that today is also the world of cocaine, can only “enrich” itself by “impoverishing” our real world (Marx, 1968, pp. 45-46); the “vampire of capital,” like that of heroin, can only survive by absorbing our “life blood” (1985, pp. 179-195). And capitalism, which governs the methamphetamine market, can only create “capital” by losing our “life” (1968, pp. 282-286). Likewise, in Lacan’s vision, the system can only create the symbolic by losing the real, can only perform work by producing a renunciation of enjoyment, and can only use our labour power by impeding us from enjoying our life (Lacan, 1991, 2001a, 2006). This life cannot be enjoyed by us as life, as drive, because it has to be employed as labour force, as workforce, by a system whose workplaces are not just mines and factories, but also nightclubs and the fantastic spaces of dreams, films, videogames and altered states of consciousness induced by drugs.

Like capitalism, all other “symbolic systems of culture” can only do their work—“the work of the unconscious”—by “exploiting the use value of our life as the labour force of the system” (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2010, pp. 161-210). This exploitation permits the production of surplus-value that may take the form of the value of money, but also that of any other symbolic value in culture, including the one we find in altered states induced by drugs. Though we may say that these states are induced by drugs, the truth is that drugs are but their raw material, and their surplus of symbolic value for us can only be produced through our exploitation as the workforce of the system. But this exploitation may be concealed by our identification with the system. After all, we are the system. I is an Other, and the Other’s discourse appears as my own. But it is not mine. Even when I hallucinate it with the help of hallucinogenic drugs, I only express it, for it is articulated by the Other. It is the work of the unconscious.

I am simply the workforce of the unconscious, the labour power of the system, but I can hardly become aware of this because of my identification with a “master-signifier” that represents the system as a whole (Lacan, 1991). In capitalism, for instance, I lose sight of my exploitation at the moment that I identify with capitalism, with the capitalist class, with the First World, with being a successful consumer in consumer society. Here, in malls and boutiques, among the healthy, wealthy people so well-identified with the exploiting system, it is difficult indeed to become aware of being exploited by the system. To gain such awareness, it is better to move to the other side of the sales counter, to workplaces or places of suffering like factories and hospitals, and approach
working people, sufferers, “the lame” or “the sick”, those who uncovered the truth of exploitation for both Freud and Marx (Lacan, 2009, p. 164).

Indeed, the truth of the Marxian proletarian, exploited by the capitalist system, was also the truth of Freud’s hysterics and neurotics, those exploited by the symbolic system of culture, which embraces the capitalist system. Similarly, today, the truth of the exploited drug addict is the truth of the exploited drug producer.

What then do neurotics, hysterics, proletarians, drug-providers and drug addicts all have in common? The answer is that they all encounter difficulties in achieving identification with the system. Hence they suffer what they rightly perceive as alienation within that system. As long as they feel alienated within the system, they can live the experience of their exploitation by the system; they can know “the truth” of their “proletarian” condition in the system (Lacan, 2006, pp. 172-173). This knowledge of the truth corresponds, in Freud, to the experience of the work of the unconscious, as in symptoms or dreams, slips, parapraxis, or bungled actions. In all these situations, we come to realize that we are just the enunciating workforce that expresses that which is never consciously articulated by us. In the same way, Marxian proletarians know that they are just the workforce that does the work of the system, which openly decides what they are to do and how they are to go about doing it. This holds true as well for neurotics, hysterics or drug addicts, all of whom are aware of their powerlessness in the face of their own behaviour, addictions, symptoms and other manifestations of the work of the unconscious, of language, of the system.

**PROVIDING DRUGS**

The trans-individual system that exploits drug providers is the same one that exploits drug consumers. Thus we may hope that the situation of consumers could be illuminated through an analysis of the experience of their providers. In Mexico, this experience is generally framed in a “command of violence” (Hernández, 2010, p. 17), which seems to be related to a violent “superego” that supports culture while pointing to the most “skinned,” sensitive and vulnerable cultural sites (Freud, 1996a, p. 137). This can be seen in the “codes of loyalty” among drug providers that “must be respected to the letter” (Reyna, 2011, p. 54), though in reality they are constantly betrayed in illustrations of the phenomenon that McIntosh (1975) calls “thieves’ honour,” and defines as “a set of highly volatile expectations, pressures and treachery” (pp. 48-49).

We know that a kind of thieves’ honour prevails everywhere in the capitalist system, which today also embraces the experience of drug providers as a particular experience of capitalism, for it must be stressed that capitalism also conforms and governs the drug market. In Mexico, for instance, the drug trade produces an estimated annual profit of 25 billion dollars, money that contaminates some 78% of the country economy (Turati, 2011, p. 33). There is, indeed, a free market of illicit drugs, characterized by capitalist forms of monopolization, accumulation and unfettered competition.

In the drug market, like everywhere else in the system, surplus-value is produced by exploiting a labour force whose “use value” is much greater than its “exchange value,” which corresponds to the minimum necessary to procure the “means of sustenance” of the “labour force” (Marx, 1985, p. 133). Let us examine the case of workers who package drugs in Monterrey, or that of peasants who cultivate opium in Guerrero (Turati, 2011, pp. 119-285). These people work hard to earn their living. In so doing, they produce billions of dollars, but they remain poor. No concept of workers’ rights
exists there, only persecution by the police, and the ever-present threat of being killed by rival groups or even by one’s own boss. Workers’ lives, disposable, throw-away lives, have no value beyond their use value as a labour force within a capitalist system that exploits them thoroughly. Thus, they are obliged to renounce all enjoyment of life, also thoroughly. This is how they experience capitalist culture and its discontent.

The first beneficiaries of the exploitation of drug-workers are the so-called “drug lords” whose identification with the capitalist symbolic system, through the master-signifier of ever-accumulating capital, is clearly demonstrated by the categorical imperative that compels them to always obtain all the capital they possibly can, even at the expense of their neighbour. This new manifestation of the “super-ego” as the psychological expression of “culture” (Freud, 1996a, pp. 136-139) leads us to assume that there can never be enough money to fill the real “emptiness” of the symbolic system (Lacan, 1986, pp. 153-165). And since all this money must be obtained even at the expense of one’s neighbour, we may also assume that the drug lords’ rivals will become their worst enemies. The drug market, like any other neo-liberal sphere of exchange, thus becomes a battlefield in which competitors struggle for territories that permit their enrichment at the expense of their neighbours.

In the territorial struggle, some drug lords have been amazingly successful; for example, El Chapo Guzmán, one of the richest men in the world and number one on the FBI’s most-wanted list, a ruthless drug lord who has already eliminated most of his enemies, both in Mexico and beyond its borders (Henley, 2011). Today, according to most experts, the Mexican government protects him and actually helps him eliminate his competitors (Ravelo, 2009). This subordination of the government’s will to El Chapo’s financial power confirms the Marxian postulate of the subordination of the conscious political State to unconscious economic forces (Marx, 1982), while also corroborating, in our Lacanian perspective, the subordination of the psychological imaginary sphere of deliberate decisions to the meta-psychological sphere of the capitalist symbolic system (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2010).

El Chapo’s multinational organization not only provides 25% of all the drugs imported into the United States, but it also has its hands in many other economic activities: the white slave trade, money laundering, smuggling, and illegal weapons trafficking, all this in 47 countries, even Afghanistan, where it sells weapons from Eastern Europe to buy heroin for distribution in Western Europe (Peña, 2010; Gómora, 2011). With his personal fortune estimated at more than one billion dollars, and his goal of accumulating more and more money in order to symbolically fill the real void, El Chapo is a perfect capitalist, a faultless incarnation of Capital, that “vampire of capital” that can only stay alive, like the vampire of heroin, by absorbing our “living blood” (Marx, 1985, p. 179). This blood pertains not only to the 100,000 drug addicts killed by heroin each year (McBride, 2010), but also to the half-million Mexican drug workers (Turati, 2011, p. 33), or the 40,000 people who have been killed in Mexico’s drug war in the last five years (Kraus, 2011).

THE WAR ON DRUGS

When we analyse the death industry in Mexico’s drug war, we find, once again, that we are dealing with the logic of capitalism. People are being paid not only to kill, but also to bury the victims or otherwise get rid of their bodies. We could mention the case of Santiago Meza, who was paid $2,400 dollars per month to dissolve bodies—5 per
week—in containers filled with acid and caustic soda (Turati, 2011, pp. 27, 192-193), a mixture that transformed hundreds of bodies into the cold hard cash generated by the disappearance of those human corpses. Just like any other machine of the capitalist system—or any other symbolic system—those dissolving vats may be conceived as symbolizing machines that require the real in order to produce a symbolic surplus-value that may take the form of money. In this case, each human cadaver dissolved produced the amount of $120 USD.

Turning to the hitmen who work for narco-enterprises, we learn that they earn from $400 to $4,000 USD per month, or around $40 dollars per victim (Turati, 2011, p. 119). A young killer was recently asked if he felt anything while performing his work; his answer: “we don’t see any people fall; all we see is money falling” (p. 110). As is customary in the capitalist system, the symbolic value of money takes the place of real people. The real “thing” is “killed” by the “symbol” (Lacan, 1999, p. 317). The symbol of $40 dollars is nothing but the symbolic representative of the real body. However, at the end of symbolization, the dead body is nothing but the embodiment of its representative. The body is “the signifier” of the $40 dollars that it “represents for the signifier” of the killer, such that the relationship between the killer and his victim is not an “inter-subjective” one, but only an “inter-signifying” connection (Lacan, 2009, p. 10). Likewise, the killer is represented before the boss by two different signifiers, or symbolic values, namely, the exchange value and the use value of his particular labour force. If the exchange value corresponds to his weekly wage of $100 dollars, then the use value may be, for instance, the dead body it produces every week, or the $1,000 dollars that El Chapo’s enterprise pays to the boss for each dead body.

Unlike money, the lives sacrificed for money cannot be counted or calculated. However, in capitalism, life becomes equivalent to dollars, quantitative like money. This quantitative symbolization, which imposes the arithmetical functioning of money on life, can be illustrated by the ejecutómetro (“execution-meter”), which on daily television dutifully reports the number of people executed in Mexico’s drug war (Turati, 2011, pp. 30-31). Following this logic, one drug enterprise decided to kill 135 people to pay for the confiscation of 135 tons of marijuana (p. 30).

In the capitalist system, life becomes something entirely quantifiable, calculable, and reducible to money or other quantitative values, such as economic data, sociological or psychological statistics. But the fact remains that there is always something real in life, something irreducible to these symbolic values. And we know that many drug consumers are looking for that. They use drugs in order to recover the same real thing that is destroyed by the acids and other means used to provide them with their drugs. But drugs can be as destructive of the real as acid and similar substances.

Just like the caustic soda, gunpowder and other fuels that supply the means of production in the capitalist symbolic system, drugs make it possible to symbolize qualitative real life and transform it into the quantitative symbolic value of money. In the end, as in the milieu of the greedy Midas, there is nothing more than large quantities of gold, capital, money. This reminds us of the film Pecados de mi padre by Nicolás Entel (2009), in which the son of Escobar, leader of the Medellin drug cartel, recounts how they were surrounded by money, but ravaged by hunger. In other words, their surroundings were full of the symbolic system of capitalism, but also full of its discontent, full of the emptiness of the real. Is this not exactly that which the environment is becoming under the destructive power of capitalism? Capitalist culture is destroying the natural environment and transforming everything into the countless
symbolic forms of capital that contaminate a world where there is no more place for real food. Where yesterday we found food, today we find bio-fuels and drugs.

CONCLUSION: FLATTERING THE SYSTEM

As a commodity, drugs are just another form of capital, and they entail a discontent inherent in the capitalist culture. They cannot remedy discontent without producing it. This discontent is suffered by both consumers and providers, for both do the work of renouncing the real enjoyment of their drives, of their lives, which must be transformed into the labour force of the symbolic system. This is the only way in which the system can ensure the supply of—and demand for—illicit drugs, which in turn allows the system to maintain us within it, while safely un-satisfying our desire to escape from it, either by consuming drugs, or by participating in the clandestine activities of drug-trafficking.

By creating the illusion that we are escaping from the system, the illicit character of drugs constitutes a clever way of impeding us from really escaping from the system, from challenging it, even subverting it. These threats to the system can be warded off by a daydream of revolt and liberation from within the system itself. Such a chimera may enable the adaptation of those perceived as hopeless cases, those radically refractory to the system. Dangerous marginal people may become drug-providers or consumers, and thus adapt to the capitalist system of consumerism and production. This adaptation permits the exploitation of people who seemed to be un-exploitable.

The need for drugs thus attaches drug consumers to the capitalist system. Their demand for drugs is their contribution to the functioning of the system. Their discontent is the evidence of their work for the system. So we need to analyse the system in order to explain the demand and the need for drugs, as well as the underlying discontent.

Here we do indeed assume that the psychological experiences of drug consumers can only be explained in the global meta-psychological context of capitalist culture and in relation to local subcultures of drug-dealing and trafficking. The discontent involved in these subcultures might even be advantageously used by psychologists to elucidate the discontent related to the need for drugs. This need must not be individualised, psychologised, naturalised, or abstracted from the capitalist symbolic system. There is a deep and close connection between the violent devices of the system that allow the provisioning of drugs, and the reflexive need to escape from this system, that urge us to consume drugs. After all, as noted above, this need would also push us to become involved in clandestine activities, such as the work of drug-dealing, which create the illusion of being outside the system when we still are inside it and working for it.

The outlaw still works for the system. This is what Jacques Mesrine, a French criminal who escaped from prison three times, learned from the communist Charlie Bauer. In the film by Jean-François Richet (2008), Mesrine intends to “explode the system,” but Bauer rightly accuses him of “flattering the system.” This is the kind of intervention that we would recommend to psychologists who work in prisons and rehabilitation centres, with drug users and providers. Both addicts and traffickers must come to understand that they are actually working for the system though they believe that their activities are challenging it. Their challenging impulse should be really used to challenge the system and its functioning through addiction and trafficking.

A profound psychological intervention against addiction and trafficking must take the form of a political intervention against the capitalist system that induces both
addiction and trafficking. This is not only the correct intervention for us, but it might also objectively be the most successful way of doing psychology in the conditions explained above. Under concealed exploitation, we must support addicts and traffickers to uncover how the system exploits their addiction and their trafficking.

Addicts and traffickers must realize that even if, like Mesrine, they escape from prison or the rehabilitation centre, they remain in the system, though only on its margins, where the system still needs people working to preserve it. Here we also find exploited workers, such as addicts, dealers and other criminals, as well as prostitutes, vagrants, the sick, neurotics and hysterics, lumpenproletarians and even proletarians whose exploitation is inseparable from an evident marginalization.

REFERENCES

Chapter 19

Psychology in a society beyond liberalism and communitarianism

Gordana Jovanović
University of Belgrade, Serbia

SUMMARY

Psychology faces new social conditions which have put to question some of the core assumptions on which it is based. Yet psychology continues to play an important role in sustaining existing social orders by reproducing dominant ideological individualism and generating overwhelming psychologizations. I will analyze new conditions as described in the discourses of globalization, postmodernity and postcolonialism. Furthermore, I will examine two still politically powerful doctrines, liberalism and communitarianism, with regard to their capacities to stand on their own claims. Additionally, possibilities and limits of supporting them by psychological theories will be analyzed. Relying on these critical analyses I will argue for a different psychology, reflective of the social embeddedness of its objects, its theorizing, and its practice. Such a psychology is needed to work for radical social change, but at the same time such a psychology would be possible only as part of radical changes in society as whole.

DISCOURSES OF SOCIETY UNDER NEW CONDITIONS

My claim in this paper is that psychology continues to play an important role in sustaining existing social orders by reproducing dominant ideological individualism and generating overwhelming psychologizations—despite the challenges it faces under existing social conditions, which have questioned some of its core assumptions. As a consequence of these patterns and processes, social issues have been translated into individual (therapeutic) problems. With such an attitude, society as a whole becomes exempted as a subject matter from critical analysis, even more so as a target of practical and political struggle for a radical change (Bauman, 1991).

In order to reverse this state, it is necessary to develop a different psychology, reflective of the social embeddedness of its theorizing and practice, but first of its objects. However, it should be made clear that this would be possible only as part of radical changes in society as a whole. Joint activities ought to be directed toward creating truly new conditions compared to the existing ones, which substantially reproduce ancient regimes of repression, exclusion, inequality, and manipulation—though in a rhetorical guise of democracy and progress.

To work toward this goal presupposes a previous task: defining and describing existing social conditions and the ways psychology operates under them. There are diagnoses of our era as the third industrial revolution. What is meant by this is much more than a mass, efficient industrial production of commodities. The consequences have changed the roles between the producer and the products—the products dominate
over producers. Günther Anders (2002a, 2002b) took this relation as the main topic of his philosophy.

A peculiar dynamics is at work nowadays. Contemporary societies are hybrid systems, operating in some domains according to a strong modernist agenda (promoting radical individualism; instrumental rationality; bureaucratization), whilst in others with a postmodernist attitude (fostering virtual realities, even in economic spheres; focusing attention on appearance and design instead of substance and essence; investing more and more in communication and exchange). Additionally, there is a regressive turn toward pre-modern, actually feudal patterns: the dissolution and fragmentation of central states; states losing their monopoly over the use of force; the outbursts of violence in everyday life, and the spread of ghettos are just a few telling examples.

Information technologies have substantially changed the status of time perspectives. The privileged cyber-time is a kind of eternal presence which has outlawed the past and impatiently transformed the coming future into the lasting presence.

Among the different attempts to name the specificity of these conditions, the most used labels since the last decades of the 20th century have been globalization, postmodernity, and postcolonialism. Though these notions have some shared semantic content, they nevertheless assume different standpoints in approaching the new conditions of life. Some of the labels express a break or rupture, while some focus on the spread of changes. Their mutual relations are also of importance. While globalization refers to economic, political and cultural changes, postmodernity has a cultural origin and focus. The case of postcolonialism is even more specific: its origin is on the periphery, and its concern is a still-operating colonial legacy in symbolic domains. It is in this indirect way that postcolonialism could contribute to raising a critical self-understanding of former colonizers, which have preserved their dominant role, even after the liberation of colonies.

In spite of quite important differences, all three discourses chosen here to be briefly described refer to remarkable changes in the functioning of societal institutions, as well as economic, cultural and other symbolic domains. Therefore, they are relevant to the main task posed here, namely to analyze the role of psychology in sustaining these conditions and then to try to envisage psychology’s potential to engage in creating more human conditions.

**Globalization**

The very term “globalization” has undergone rapid changes since its inception in the 1980s in the USA. Then it referred to changes in market functioning. Now it captures planetary changes and shifts at the level of states, societies, institutions, cultures as well as individual lives. Globalization has been driven by economic, especially financial forces—world trade and financial transactions, transnational capital investments, international goods and financial markets, capital and labor migrations and new information and communication technologies (Martell, 2010). A seminal book, *Global Transformations* (Held et al., 1999), describes a growing world-wide interconnectedness in all aspects of life as the core meaning of the notion of globalization.

However, behind the neutral notion of interconnectedness, one finds a global, planetary spread of some very specific patterns of institutions, activities, products, technologies, beliefs, and values. Though obviously not all activities, products, beliefs
and norms are equally eligible to become globalized, and certainly not all have and will have equal chances, it seems that the notion of globalization nurtures a kind of contrafactual belief in equity in global relations. The globalization process has stretched some local patterns far beyond the boundaries of their location of origin, but at the same time has brought about a widespread disappearance of many other longstanding local traditions. Even more, it has endangered once powerful institution such as the nation-state. Thus, the very term globalization conceals its unmarked meaning, which refers to ongoing processes of repression, marginalization, exclusion, or even destruction—military globalization (Held et al., 1999) is a powerful means successfully used for such purposes. Therefore, critical theories of globalization would have to examine also the unacknowledged agenda of globalization—for example, hegemony and imperialism. (cf. Appelbaum & Robinson, 2005; Ojeili & Hayden, 2006).

Thus, it would be more appropriate to understand the notion of globalization as an ideologically-saturated concept. At the same time, it should be taken into account that the shift toward globalization coincides with the diagnosis of the end of ideology, as famously proclaimed by Francis Fukuyama in 1992—as the end of history, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution, and the universalization of Western liberal democracy. It is striking and highly ironic that the supposed end of ideology coincides with the planetary spread and imposition—by economic, cultural, but also military means—of an historically recent pattern of economic and social practices and beliefs and norms meant to reshape societies and individual lives as we have come to know them since modern times. Thus the proclaimed end of ideology coincides with the monopoly of one ideology.

**Postcolonialism**

Globalization processes, including their discursive aspects, followed discursive projects aimed at reflecting on the colonial legacy—theorizing relations between colonizer and colonized, Western and non-Western societies, cultures and selves—and known under the name “postcolonial studies.” The adjective “post” literally marks the time period after the legal independence of the majority of colonies. However, postcolonial studies draw attention to still operating colonial epistemological and semiotic regimes. They claim that conceptual divisions, such as “white” vs. “black,” “Occident” vs. “Orient,” reproduce, at a symbolic level, a colonial, Eurocentric attitude toward the other. In other words, in colonial thinking colonization is continued by other means. The question to be concerned with is: “What has been the contribution of the human sciences to imperial construals of non-Western ‘others’?” (Staeuble, 1999, p. 312)

There were anticolonial voices during the colonial period—the best known example being Franz Fanon with his books *Black Skin, White Masks* (*Peau noire, masques blancs*) published 1952 in French and *The Wretched of the Earth* (*Les Damnés de la Terre*) published in 1961 in French. Even after its translation into English in 1967, the first book had to wait until the 1980s to become widely read. The second book was written during the Algerian struggle for independence. A preface written by Jean-Paul Sartre had influenced the reception of the book—it was misunderstood as advocating violence in response to colonizer’s violence. Such an understanding was in itself an example of colonial argumentation—obviously only colonizers should have a monopoly on violence. Sartre recommended the book for Fanon “shows clearly that this irrepresible violence is … man re-creating himself. I think we understood this truth at
one time, but we have forgotten it—that no gentleness can efface the marks of violence; only violence itself can destroy them” (Sartre, 1961). Fanon himself concluded his book quite constructively—with an appeal to work out new concepts and to work toward a new man.

It seems a historical distance from colonialism, i.e., liberation of colonies, was necessary for postcolonial studies to be established and acknowledged. This is an important fact from the social genesis of postcolonial theories, not an external fact to them. It reveals its intrinsic dynamics—postcolonial thinking should be itself liberated from the colonial legacy, but it should be at the same time equipped with conceptual tools capable of capturing mediated and remote traces and derivations of colonial dominance. This is best demonstrated in the most important figures of diasporic postcolonial theory: Edward Said (Orientalism, 1978), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (“Can the Subaltern Speak,” 1988), and Homi Bhabha (The Location of Culture, 1994).

Postcolonialism shares a discursive space with conceptualizations of globalization. As there are many features of globalization processes which repeat patterns of colonialism, globalization obviously provides fresh material for a postcolonial critique. Will it be necessary to wait until globalization becomes a solid past before it will be constructed as an object of postcolonial critique? So far postcolonialism has mainly dealt with legacies of past colonialism present in the epistemic apparatus of our human and social sciences and symbolic tools of culture.

**Postmodernity**

If there is a tension between postcolonialism and globalization, there is much congruence between postcolonialism and postmodernity. But the differences should not be overlooked either. Postcolonialism argues for empowerment of subjects, not their disappearance—to mention just one very important line of division. Some authors are even concerned about “how to avoid ‘liaison dangereuse’ between post-colonialism and postmodernism” (Maffettone, 2011, p. 37).

Both postmodernity and postmodernism label new conditions that depart from the project of modernity. Jean-François Lyotard named it, in a peculiar manifesto of postmodernity published in 1979, “the postmodern condition,” meaning first of all the end of grand narratives of modernity. “We no longer have recourse to the grand narratives – we can resort neither to the dialectic of Spirit nor even to the emancipation of humanity as a validation for postmodern scientific discourse” (Lyotard, 1994, p. 335). Though postmodern discourses are very heterogeneous, they all share a radical rejection of modern commitments to totality, rationality, unity, and universalism.

It is striking that this positioning of postmodernity against any grand narratives coincides with processes and discourses of globalization that are grand narratives par excellence. But it would be very naïve to assume that the postmodern attitude functions as a resistance to globalization. On the contrary, the standpoint of postmodernism offers no means whatsoever to reflect on structures, first of all, economic and legal ones (for example, multinational concerns, or the International Monetary Fund, or the World Bank), which have generated some of the most fundamental changes in societies and the lives of their citizens.

But discourses of postmodernity still claim to capture new conditions and even invite us to produce such new conditions—by waging “a war on totality,” as declared by Lyotard in his book meant to “explain postmodernity to children” (Lyotard, 1986). New
situations are supposed to be produced in which consensus has no place, as “consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value” (Lytard, 1994, p. 340). In view of Axel Honneth, Lyotard (and it could be added, other postmodernists too) has developed a strong “affect against the general” (Honneth, 1984, p. 893). Consequently, Honneth argues, Lyotard is not interested in raising any questions related to general presuppositions of human activity and especially communication—to him, “the general is wrong in itself” (Honneth, 1984, p. 901). There are other peculiarities of postmodern semiosis—an “exacerbated staging of communication” (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 100). Furthermore, at the basic semiotic level signs are increasingly losing their referencing function—instead, they have become something like self-contained signifiers, at play in an ongoing carnival of signs, as suggestively described by Baudrillard. In spite of postmodern work on the translation of society into a network of temporary and transitory interactions, I have argued elsewhere that one cannot see “any paths along which postmodernity could theoretically (and pragmatically) establish communication between actors. By communication I mean exchange of subjective contents aimed at mutual understanding, which presupposes reference to a symbolic world of shared knowledge, beliefs, [and] values” (Jovanović, 1999, p. 414).

Even if postmodernists are not interested in situating signifiers and games in a broader social context, signs cannot be excluded from that context. Terry Eagleton points out a double function of liberated signifiers: “The cult of the text would thus fulfill the ambivalent function of all utopia: to provide us with a frail image of a freedom we might otherwise fail to commemorate, but in doing so to confiscate some of the energies which we might have invested in its actual realization” (Eagleton, 1997, p. 18).

Even from this sketchy picture it should be evident that the descriptions and interpretations of new conditions raise many questions. Some of them are related to the core issues of psychology. If we take the three discourses (postmodernity, postcolonialism, and globalization) together, we see that they offer different depictions and understandings of present social conditions. Is there a new grand narrative at work (globalization) or have we abandoned not only grand narratives, but extinguished any need for such narratives altogether (postmodernity)? Can we give up concepts of totality or are we forced more than ever to think unthinkable totalities? Is communication possible at all if there are no shared, common meanings? Is it possible to sustain any kind of life if all structures are dissolved? Is it possible to develop consciousness and self-consciousness if there is no agenteive structure?

Though differences among three discourses expand in some regard into contradictory statements, this is not surprising. One reason for this is certainly an unprecedented complexity of the conditions under which societies and individuals have to function nowadays. Any good critical analysis has to maintain that complexity through the analytic process instead of employing the usual strategies of reducing the complexity of phenomena for the sake of methods of analysis.

**PSYCHOLOGY UNDER NEW CONDITIONS,**

**PSYCHOLOGY FOR NEW CONDITIONS**

There is a logical justification, a necessity actually, for taking the social conditions of psychology into account: both the objects of psychology (human subjects) and epistemic subjects live in social worlds and share their knowledge with others in these
worlds. Nevertheless, there is a long and influential tradition of desocializing both objects and subjects of psychological knowledge. Individualism appears as a dominant pattern in conceptualizing individuals, even societies. It is still prevailing as an individualistic epistemology that conceives of knowledge production as an achievement of individual subjects. Methodological individualism seems to be widely adopted among human and social sciences. As psychology is well represented in all these individualistic endeavors and settings, it has played an important role in sustaining and legitimizing individualistic ideology.

Individualistic ideology cannot bring about changes towards societies that would provide resources, tools, and incentives for the development of individuals interested and capable of building common world, according to the literal sense of *sensus communis*. It is worth keeping in mind that such an understanding of *sensus communis* was advocated by Shaftesbury (1999/1711), but evidently an individualistic and cognitivistic transformation of *sensus communis* has prevailed.

Social changes cannot be brought about without psychology. But in order to bring about changes with a place for all human beings, another psychology is needed. Günther Anders has warned us in his book *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* [The Outdatedness of Human Beings]:

It does not suffice to change the world. We do that anyway. And to a large extent that happens even without our involvement. In addition we have to interpret this change. Precisely because to change it. That therefore the world does not change without us. And ultimately into a world without us. (Anders, 2002b, p. 5)

I have argued that only a socialized psychology can work toward such goals. By the socialization of psychology, I mean a conceptual, theoretical, and methodological transformation of psychology (Jovanović, 2010). The first steps would be the deconstruction of individualistic anthropological assumptions, individualizing psychological conceptualizations, and epistemological and methodological individualisms.

In understanding human beings we can take the individual as our starting point and focus on, or, alternatively, take as our unit of analysis the individual in its social world. Even if the second approach has its origins already in ancient Greek philosophy, famously in Aristotle’s *zoon politikon*, and counts among its representatives such figures as Kant, Hegel and Marx, it has remained less powerful in shaping social institutions. Paradoxically enough, individualism has proved to be stronger in shaping not only the self-understanding of individuals, but also our very social institutions and discourses (Greenwood, 2003).

Liberalism is a political doctrine based on individualism. It is the dominant political and economic doctrine today, claiming to be the only one which can protect human rights and offer the best moral foundations for a democratic society (Rawls, 1977, 1993). Beyond that, this claim is used to spread, even to impose liberalism. As it is suggested with the name itself, liberalism is strongly associated with liberty. However, liberalism presupposes an individualistic concept of liberty. Semantically it refers more to the absence or removal of forces beyond the boundaries of the individual, which are supposed to be only obstacles, than to conditions which can support and foster the development of individual capacities.

Liberalism can be sustained only on naturalistic grounds, as it assumes that all that is necessary for the freedom of the individual is given (by nature). At the end of the 17th century John Locke (1690), with his understanding of men as naturally free, equal and
independent, defined the basic assumption of liberalism. No doubt it is important to acknowledge equal natural rights to all human beings. This includes the requirement that no human being can be deprived of these rights under any circumstances. But it is clear that it is not nature that guarantees human life—human life in its development, diversity, and richness is not a natural event. It requires a special environment in order to be lived. This special environment can be provided only by social relations, by social and cultural tools. It is striking that liberalism can oversee this fact. I would claim that there is an explanatory gap between the naturalistic assumptions on which liberalism is based and the socio-cultural genesis of the individual.

Liberalism has no conceptual tools to grasp social relations and tools, since they cannot be derived from achievements of an individual. By referring only to natural resources, endowments, and rights, liberalism leaves empty the space of proper individual development. Therefore, in spite of its rhetorical apology for the individual, liberalism instead inhibits the prospects of individuals to acquire the necessary capacities to live freely (Jovanović, 2005). I want to argue that the manifest advocacy of the priority of the individual in liberalism is subverted by its hidden incapacity to conceptualize conditions that are necessary for the realization of individuals’ potentials.

Liberalism is the grounding element of globalization; in fact, globalization has its origin in the globalization of economic liberalism. Though it might seem at a first glance that globalism is opposed to liberalism, the driving force of globalization is neo-liberal model of economy—so-called free market, minimal state, reduction of rights of employees, market criteria in assessing all activities and products (including health and education).

What are the consequences of the globalized liberalism for psychic life? Thanks to globalization people are exposed to more influences and restrictions comparing to context of nation-state in which liberalism originally appeared. Under new conditions people suffer consequences of decisions of so many actors they even don’t know they exist. As the state is withdrawing from many spheres of life, not only economy, there is indeed no protection of second generation of human rights—social rights (right to employment, education, health). Even political rights, to which liberalism is oriented, are losing their meaning—people are affected by decisions of actors who have no political legitimacy as they are not elected by citizens to represent their interests. Contrary to the promises of liberalism, of a growing space to freely shape one’s own life, there is instead a growing helplessness before powers which operate at a distance but still reach so many by remote influence and control.

What would be the role of psychology under such conditions? With its individualistic biases psychology would have an ideological function—to provide concepts and explanatory patterns which would reproduce the belief that the individual has autonomy in relation to community or society. This would associate psychology with a humanistic stance at a first glance. But, individualism also means that only the individual is responsible for his or her failures. Thus, the original liberal priority of individual rights has been transformed into a concern with individual responsibilities. This certainly cannot be true on logical grounds—actions and activities are not performed in a vacuum, but in an environment which includes material and symbolic objects and other subjects, who can assume different roles; observers, supporters, opponents. It is logically inconsistent to think that it is the same to perform an action with or without objects or subjects. Nevertheless, individualism remained a prevailing feature of most psychological theorizing.
The same feature has characterized psychology’s understanding of its own history. However, there have been turns toward social histories of psychology (Danziger, 1997; Jaeger & Staeuble, 1978; Rose, 1985). These deal with the emergence of psychology as an independent science and its early history in a context of modernizing social life, acknowledgment of new social needs, and the necessity to provide knowledge on individuals facing new tasks (in a different organization of production, new forms of labor, in reshaping family roles, etc.).

Given the specificity of existing new conditions, it is a challenge to attempt a social history of psychology under these new conditions. Psychology was built on core modern assumptions—of a more or less stable subject as agency entering relations with other subjects and with the physical world and preserving a sense of identity over time (Habermas, 1985). These assumptions are no longer valid under new conditions. Postmodern discourses, which owe its emergence the new conditions (Harvey, 1989), not only question and criticize them; they fulfill also the constructive function of offering and defending alternative attitudes, concepts and values. Here are just a few examples of postmodernism’s achievements: the subject as an agency declared dead and dissolved into sets of temporary interaction patterns; identity discredited in favor of difference; continuity suspended and replaced by ruptures; unity delegitimized as a source of repression and substituted by the promotion of fragments; universality disregarded in favor of the local, the temporary. The deconstruction of the very concept of agentive subject has its parallel in the changed position of subjects in globalized societies. They become more and more helpless with regard to possibilities to influence basic conditions of their lives.

The strong, autonomous self, once presupposed by psychology to be the normative goal of individual development—cognitive as well as moral (Piaget’s developmental psychology being a good representative of this)—is disappearing. With the suspension of autonomy, increasing otherdirectedness (by mass media, aggressive marketing), constraints in the capacity to pay attention to and process an overload of sensations, thoughts, feelings, decisions; with the transformation of rights into conditional economic availability (dignity, health, education); and with a general exposure to the invisible hands of market, the liberal self has become, more precisely has been made, obsolete. Nevertheless, the ideology of liberalism continues to defend supposedly autonomous individuals without addressing the conditions which are keeping them in inescapable dependency.

Liberalism has become the target of critique of an alternative understanding of the human being as a social being and an opposing political doctrine: communitarianism (e.g., Mac Intyre, 1981; Taylor, 1985, 1989). In this view, community is formative of the individual self. Contrary to the liberal unencumbered self, communitarians see the self as necessarily bounded—bounded by the beliefs and norms of the community of which the individual is a member. Community provides its individual members with frameworks within which to understand themselves and others as moral actors. Charles Taylor, in his critique of liberalism, pointed out that rights—the central concern in liberalism—presuppose recognition within a community. Consequently, it is not possible even to define rights, even less to speak of their fulfilment, without reference to community. This is another argument in favor of the conclusion already expressed—liberalism cannot stand to its own claims.

A communitarian view can be supported by some psychological theories—by the symbolic interactionism of George Herbert Mead (1934) and the cultural-historical
theory of Vygotsky. Both theories argue for a social genesis of self. What is missing in both theories and what is, in my view, also a limit of communitarian argumentation, are conceptual means to understand that individuals can, to some extent, transcend their communities. In other words, internalized outcomes of interaction are not just reproductions of overt social forms. Both Mead and Vygotsky explain the genesis of counciousness according to the model of identity. We can read in Mead's paper “The Social Self” of 1913: “And the ‘me’ of introspection is the same ‘me’ that is the object of the social conduct of others.” Similarly, when defending the concept of taking the role of the other as a mechanism of the development of consciousness, Mead never left room for difference (Mead, 1934). In Vygotsky’s notion that the higher psychic functions appear twice there is a similar identity model at work. “The very mechanism underlying higher mental functions is a copy from social interaction; all higher mental functions are internalized social relationships” (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 164). However, I want to argue that internalization of the social cannot simply be a copy on an individual mental level; it is always necessarily also a transformation of the original social form. The very fact that the same patterns of social interaction produce different individualized subjectivities proves that the copy or identity model of subjectivity cannot grasp the social genesis of subjectivity.

Almost at the same time as Mead and Vygotsky theorized the social self, but in quite different historical and social settings, the German sociologist Helmuth Plessner (1924) warned of the dangers of losing distance in community, in a treatise under a telling title Grenzen der Gemeinschaft (The Limits of Community).

Plessner’s warning is applicable to communitarianism as it does not see a possibility of Aufhebung (elevation) of community by community means. In that regard, I would claim, its attitude approaches that of liberalism; state differently, community in the communitarian model attains a status similar to the individual in liberalism. In the same way as decentering from individuocentrism is needed, it is needed also from community-centrism. Isolation and alienation from society are dangers implicated in liberalism. Absorption and total immersion in community are dangers and limits of communitarianism. The rise of tribalism or other forms of communitarian fundamentalism (religious, national) in the last decades proves this in a very dramatic way.

CONCLUSION

If psychology should serve needs for future radical social change, then it should change its theoretical edifice, currently founded on the idea of a liberal self. To a great extent psychological theorizing and practice have been the psychologization of the liberal self. Even concepts with strong social and political functions, such as freedom, were subjected to psychologization—freedom has been reduced to individual choice (Rose, 1998). Psychologization has become a feature of social and political thinking. One of the outcomes of these processes is a narcissistic culture, as described by Christopher Lash (1978).

Psychologization is a socio-cultural form of egocentrism. In the same way as egocentrism is not a sign of a strong cognitive subject, psychologization does not signal a healthy position of the self in a culture. Psychologization could be used as a double diagnosis—of both self and society. With regard to society it is a form of reductionism, which translates social issues into individual, private issues. Zygmunt Bauman (1991)
pointed out further implications of psychologization and privatization: lack of social critique and resistance.

As a consequence psychologization participates in reproducing conditions which will foster further psychologization, which in turn weakens both self and society. A weak society cannot produce a strong social self. I want to make clear that a strong social self is not a tribal self. A strong social self is constituted by social means—interactions, socio-cultural tools, institutions—which empower him/her to reflect on these means, but also on conditions which hamper development, and on possibilities for a different social development.

Under conditions of globalized, psychologized societies nowadays neither liberal nor social selves can develop. Social selves have been replaced by surrogates, such as tribal, nomadic, and transitory selves, narcissistically alienated from others.

What are prospects for psychology under such conditions? Adapting to them would make psychology an accomplice in processes which will endanger the very existence of human beings. To resist them would require us to build different conceptual tools capable of capturing the social genesis of both the objects and the means to investigate them.

The first step would be to conceptually denaturalize the subject-matter of psychology. If it is understood that thinking and feeling are not natural functions, but, as Vygotsky convincingly demonstrated, historical functions in whose structures signs as cultural tools are included, this raises the awareness that this must be even more so in the case of scientific psychological thinking. If thinking is an internalized symbolically mediated interaction, it follows that the social should be the focus of psychology. Since any thinking has anticipatory potentials, psychological thinking cannot simply describe correlations between social and personality variables in post-hoc fashion, but should anticipate the subjective consequences of social arrangements, and engage in resistance against those producing harm. It would be the highest responsibility of a new psychology to oppose the “translation of social issues into private concerns.”

Since the manner in which society is organized is crucially important for psychic and psychological functioning, the proper interest of psychology should be to work theoretically and practically for a radical change of existing societies. New structures and ideas are needed to shape human lives and social worlds.

REFERENCES


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: I am grateful to William Woodward for his editorial help. This work is part of the project 179018 financed by the Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Serbia.
Chapter 20

Identity as an insecure psychological space: Reflections from the shifting ethnopolitics of Kenya

Rose C. Ruto-Korir  
*Moi University, Kenya*

**SUMMARY**

Identity is an emotive “psychological space” and its construction continues to have an impact on world peace (Bekerman, 2009; Shapiro, 2010). Clearly, in Kenya today, as in many other parts of the world, the question of identity continues to shape discourses, which include democracy, justice and inter-ethnic relations. Parekh (1994, p. 494) notes that, “during the past few decades, the concept of national identity has become the subject of intense political and philosophical debate in many countries.” Beyond Kenya, in many parts of Europe and elsewhere, Cordell and Wolff (2004, p. 2) conclude that “by the end of the 1990s, there could be little doubt that ethnicity had regained its status as a powerful force in European politics.” Taking as an example the post-election violence of 2007/08 in Kenya, which resulted in ethnic animosity, this article explores the way identity mutates across ethnopolitical and multi-ethnic contexts and appreciates the role of identity discourse in the emergence of the rather ephemeral ethnopolitical spaces engendered by ethnic cleavages.

**INTRODUCTION**

The role of identity as a major determinant of world peace is undisputed (Bekerman, 2009; Shapiro, 2010). In Kenya today, as in many other parts of the world, identity constructions continue to define both local and national discourses on dimensions such as democracy, justice, ethnic coexistence, personal security and a sense of pride. For example, the Holocaust, the Rwandan Genocide and now the post-election violence (PEV) in Kenya typify the tragic consequences of absolute identity politics and claims. Post-independence Kenya has experienced reified ethnopolitical identities as a result of differentiated personal and group interests, which converge on national resources, ethnic hegemony and multiparty politics.

On the nexus between the latter and identity, Posner (2007, p. 1304) emphasizes that “the transition from one-party to multiparty political competition … has potential to alter the identities that people embrace…” Consequently, “the ethnic face” in Kenya has continued to mutate, with both negative and positive psychosocial nuances arising from transient “outsider” or “insider” identity creations engendered by the politics inherent in the PEV experience. LeBas (2010, p. 9) further clarifies the PEV psychological space: “The January 2008 violence was, however, sharply ethnicized, and ethnicity became the primary means of sorting individuals into ‘safe’ or ‘suspect’ categories.” Reflexively, inter-group identified differences became the axis of both discomfort and survival.

In January 2008, Kenya witnessed unprecedented PEV in the wake of a disputed election outcome, as ethnic animosity disrupted a hitherto peaceful nation (Dercon & Gutiérrez-Romero, 2010; Kenya National Commission on Human Rights [KNCHR],...
2008; Muhula, 2009), an experience that jolted her previous role as a peace-builder in the region (Gutiérrez-Romero, 2010; LaBas, 2010). Analyses of the PEV from various perspectives are available. Among these are its largely general and human rights perspective (KNCHR, 2008), its political exposition (Muhula, 2009), its economic impetus (Gutiérrez-Romero, 2010), its trigger factors and characteristics (Dercon & Gutiérrez-Romero, 2010), and Yieke’s (2011) focus on the PEV’s relationship with development. Although these analyses are useful to the understanding of the PEV in Kenya, there is a gap with regard to the interface between identity and ethnopolitics, as a significant component of the appreciation of this phenomenon, which is already problematized by multi-ethnic contexts. Yet, ethnopolitics transcends Kenya, to contexts in Western and Eastern Europe (Ishiyama & Breuning, 1998). Nevertheless, what exactly is identity from an ethnic perspective? What is ethnopolitics? The following section clarifies these terms as used in this paper.

CLARIFYING CONCEPTS

What is identity then? Are tribal and ethnic identities relevant or valuable? Fearon (1999, p. 2) observes that “identity is a fairly recent social construct and a rather complicated one … everyone knows how to use the word properly [but], quite difficult to give … [a] summary … that captures the range of its present meanings.” Fearon further delineates two of its levels, the personal and the group, where the personal includes “distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes a special pride in, or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable”, while the social groups provides rules of membership (Fearon, 1999, p. 2). Apparently then, identity derived from the dictionary definition as “the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is” (Reader's Digest Oxford illustrated dictionary, 1998, p. 403) would sort people by their different characteristics that inherently include, but are not limited to, their ethnic characteristics. Therefore, to deconstruct identity in this discourse, we conflate it with tribe and ethnicity, as both intricately constitute identity.

In Africa, tribes are “clusters of groups and sub-groups, languages and dialects, shading into one another” (Shorter, 1998, p. 18). Shapiro (2010, p. 368) defines tribe as “any group whose members see themselves as (a) like-kind, (b) kinlike in their relational connections and [who are] (c) emotionally invested in their group’s enhancement” (emphasis in original). Shapiro’s inclusion of an emotional component in a group’s loyalty to the tribe is particularly persuasive as it gives a psychological impetus to this discourse. Closely related to the term tribe is ethnicity, a concept whose definition remains contentious (Baumann, 2004), although Hutchinson and Smith (cited in Baumann, 2004) identify six dimensions of an ethnic group:

- Common proper name … a myth of common ancestry that includes the idea of common origin in time and place, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture ..., a link with a homeland … its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land; … and a sense of solidarity. (p. 12, emphases in the original)

For the purposes of this paper the perspectives provided by Hutchinson and Smith are valuable especially because they foreground attributes such as a proper name, shared historical memories, a link to a geographical “homeland” and a sense of solidarity as important characteristics of an ethnic group.
The definitions above fuse tribe and ethnicity as mutual components of identity that entail both the physical and the psychological attributes requisite to identity construction. These physical attributes may include clustering (as occupying a region) and language, which, even though it is symbolic, is predominantly identifiable to a geographic space. Although it is controversial, Kenyans still construct their identities based on geographic native places of origin, naturally demarcated by ethnic group during British colonial rule. In Kenya, the “tribe remained the typical individual and social link to a group, as reinforced and legislated by the colonial administration” (Shorter, 1998, p. 18).

Posner (2007, p. 1316) observes of Kenyan ethnicity, “Kenyans identify their ‘group’ in terms of broad ethnic blocs defined by linguistic similarity, [and] region of origin” among other membership groupings. As noted earlier, Kenya has over 42 ethnic groups, which makes such identity groupings even more complex. The KNCHR (2008, p. 22) emphasize the ethnonational interests in Kenyan politics: “The clientlist nature of politics meant that many Kenyans have come to view the ascendancy of ‘one of their own’ ethnic kin to the presidency as the best assurance of ‘benefiting’ as individuals and as communities.”

Granted, to limit tribe and ethnic identity to the kinship-like connections of people already spatially spread eschews its largely inclusive nature, as it also inadvertently displays a primordial position. However, the epistemic deconstruction of tribe is beyond the scope of this paper, although it should be stated here that the Western view has largely constricted its meaning, especially as it misrepresents African identities, often displaying them as unidimensionally ethnic (Eifert et al., 2010, p. 500). Therefore, in this discussion, the conceptual value of tribe and ethnicity merely helps to clarify identity constructions in geopolitical contexts dominated by ethnonationalisms. I now turn to define ethnonationalism. Hook (2004a) provides a useful perspective, noting that psychopolitics is a critical awareness of the role that political factors (i.e. relations of power) play within the domain of the psychological. An understanding of how politics impacts upon the psychological, and how personal psychology may be the level at which politics is internalized, individually entrenched. (p. 115)

Ethnonationalism here includes the relational dimension of ethnic communities and the shifts among group members’ thinking, especially during political conflict. Conflicts generated by ethnonationalism engender among members a resurgence of a heightened sense of self relative to the group, to reinforce what Tajfel and Turner (1979) locate in social identity theory. Hook (2004b) credits the connection between psychology and politics to Fanon: “Frantz Fanon’s greatest source of originality as a critical theorist lies in his combination of psychology and politics” (p. 85). Shapiro (2010) provides insight on the role of social identity in politics and peace.

This paper consists of three parts. The first part discusses identity as embedded in the PEV in Kenya, showing how the PEV became an ethnonational political experience. The second identifies the problematic of ethnonationalism in Kenya, focusing largely on her geo-multietnic and multicultural setting. The third and final part returns to the theme of the volume—“doing psychology under different conditions” – to situate Kenya’s experience in the “global” mainstream psychology as valuable for informing its understanding of the dynamics of ethnonationalism.
POST-ELECTION VIOLENCE, ETHNOPOLITICS AND IDENTITY IN KENYA

Towards the end of December 2007, and over a couple of months afterwards, Kenya attracted international attention for all the wrong reasons. Kenya was engaged in a civil war. The KNCHR, in its report titled “On the brink of the precipice: A human rights account of Kenya’s post-2007 election violence,” exposes among other things the triggers, geographic areas affected and the aftermath of the PEV. Ethnic animosity resulted in killings and the destruction of property worth millions of Shillings. The most violent outrage came from the Kisumu, Rift Valley and Nairobi areas, predominantly occupied by the Luo, Kalenjin and Gikuyu respectively. The incumbent president, Moi Kibaki, who is a Gikuyu had allegedly won the presidency, while Raila Odinga, a Luo and a presidential contestant, together with his supporters disputed this victory, claiming that the now defunct Electoral Commission had manipulated votes from Central province (largely Gikuyu) to give Kibaki an advantage (Dercon & Gutiérrez-Romero, 2010).

Prior to the elections, ethnopolitics had dominated the campaigns, resulting in tribal alignments in terms of which the Luos, the Luhyas and the Kalenjins had united to clinch the presidency and to defeat President Kibaki (a Gikuyu), whose first term in office was ending. The Gikuyu, on the other hand, had their own ethnopolitical alignments (Dercon & Gutiérrez-Romero, 2010; Roberts, 2009; Yieke, 2011). Apart from socioeconomic factors as a determinant of ethnopolitics in Kenya, as in many parts of Africa, Posner (2007, p. 1303) underscores the value of “mobilizable ethnic cleavage.” Such ethnic cleavages re-emerge in pre-election campaigns, driven by an instrumentalist view of ethnicity in which individuals “vote their ethnic groups to maximize their access to resources” (Posner, 2007, p. 1322).

Consequently, following this acrimony, tribes turned against each other after years of peaceful coexistence (Roberts, 2009; KNCHR, 2008) because of perceived political loss. Muhula (2009, p. 84) observes that, in Kenya, “historically, the region that controls political power … also controls the direction and magnitude of economic and political resources of the state.” Muhula (2009) clarifies the role of ethnicity during the PEV stating, “[t]he ethnic and regional violence in Kenya after the controversial 2007 Presidential elections demonstrated the fluidity of ethno-regional cohesion, exposed the depth of historical grievances, and further polarized the country along ethno-regional lines” (p. 84). Clearly, ethnicity gives impetus to ethnopolitical conflicts; but more significantly, the PEV in Kenya exposed some limitations of identity as a psychological space, which resonates with Somers’ position (as cited in Valentine & Sporton, 2009) that

it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities … all of us come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making. (p. 737)

Following PEV as a historical and psycho-ethnopolitical moment, tribe and ethnic identity became one of the most uncomfortable psychosocial spaces to occupy in Kenyan history. Despite ethnic identities appearing static in their physical attribution and geographic positions, they remain dynamic, or at least in their psychological constructions, depending on the persuasions prevailing, such as during national
elections that reinforce ethnic groups’ emotional sense of group solidarity (Eifert et al., 2010).

Roberts and Remero (1998, p. 642) relate self-esteem to group comparisons as “in-group bias and negative attitudes toward out-groups can thrive based on group categorization and group comparison.” Naomi Chazan (cited in Posner, 2007) emphasizes the transience of identity as a psychological space:

Sometimes … it was expressed in cultural and linguistic terms. At other times, ethnicity was presented in regional or geographic terms. At still other points, ethnicity was manifested in local-communal—traditional, political or kin—terms. All possible ethnic-political presentations, either separately or in conjunction, could be brought to bear on the political situation depending on particular conditions. (p. 1303)

Viewed from its ephemeral meaning, identity emerges as an insecure psychological space during times of conflicts, especially in contexts where one’s identity is likely to emerge negatively. Hall (cited in Fearon, 1999) affirms this view:

Identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space or an unresolved question in that space, between a number of intersecting discourses. … [W]e have incorrectly thought that identity is a kind of fixed point of thought and being … Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point. (p. 5)

Evidently, both Chazan and Hall present a malleable identity, a dynamic that is problematic in multiparty and multiethnic political spaces like Kenya. For example, PEV revealed contentious issues beyond an alleged rigged presidential election (Dercon & Gutiérrez-Romero, 2010) and inherent ethnopolitical antecedents of a presidential office (KNCHR, 2008; Muhula, 2009). Ethnopolitics, notes Posner (2007), reinforces political competition, as national office politics reify tribal identities and generate intergroup conflict. Muhula (2009) situates the genesis of such conflicts thus:

intra-regional variations in access to … power have … sustained deep seated grievances … [with] … belief that political power provides the ethnic group of the President with exclusive advantages … deep schisms resulting from inequality in access to political and socio-economic resources remain. (p. 84)

Consequently, PEV reinforced what Posner (2007) defines as the latent characteristics of politics in most parts of Africa, which include Kenya. These are competitions to gain power and relative distribution of resources, ethnic voting with the expectation of reciprocity to access the state resources, or the clientelistic or (neo-) patronimial system of voting suggested by Young and Turner (1985, cited in Posner, 2007, p. 1303).

The third and final African political element is that of “presidentialism,” which grants the president powers (Posner, 2007, pp. 1304-1305). Moreover, governments determine the distribution of resources (Muhula, 2009), making ethnic identities relevant to their constitution (Eifert et al., 2010). These factors seemed to have triggered and sustained the PEV.

Undisputed, ethnicity takes on renewed significance during national elections when regions maintain ethnic inclinations in voting (Eifert et al., 2010), a practice upheld by politicians in Kenya during the redrafting of electoral boundaries by the newly created Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission. In 2012, as the commission collated views in order to redraft electoral boundaries on consensus, one Member of Parliament protested against boundaries that ignored tribal groupings. In her view, voting blocs should group the electorate by cultural groupings and similar economic activities (see Daily Nation 2012, 16 January).
Earlier, Fox (1996, p. 598) observed “that the parliamentary boundaries are also based on ethnic distributions and tribal subdivisions.” These geographic [read regionalised ethnic locations] demarcations are significant for national voting blocs because “coalitions are imperative in order to achieve a majority” (Fox, 1996, p. 559). Even if ethnopolitics would cease to define identity and voting, Shapiro (2010, p. 638) warns that “intertribal relationships are as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago,” especially during political competition (Eifert et al., 2010).

Therefore, it is easy to see the role played by ethnopolitics, especially in situations of conflict in Kenya and elsewhere (Ishiyama & Breuning, 1998). In Kenya, ethnicity remained the typical individual and social link to a group, as reinforced and legislated by the colonial administration (Shorter, 1998, p. 18). Posner (2007, p. 1316) writes of the composition of Kenyan ethnicity: “Kenyans identify their ‘group’ in terms of broad ethnic blocs defined by linguistic similarity, region of origin” among other membership groupings. In the wake of the PEV, identity (ethnic group) in Kenya transformed from “innocent,” “aggressor” or “victim,” mainly depending on how ethnopolitical and geopolitical spaces were constructed. For example, the Luo (or the Kalenjins who were then their allies) largely constructed a “safe” identity in their respective Luo-dominated or Kalenjin-dominated “native” areas (because animosity spread to the cities). In addition, they maintained a harmless tag with each other. This was replicated in Gikuyu-dominated areas, where there were no “foreigners” (read opponents in politics) in their geopolitical space. Elsewhere, the same Luos or Kalenjins translated into “foreigners” in their non-native spaces, emerging as victims (whether actual physical aggression transpired or not). Similarly, the Gikuyus and their allies, who found themselves in their native regions/areas, constructed their identity space as secure, meanwhile constructing their political opponents in their midst as foreigners, instantaneously creating “victims” out of them and converting their own identity as “aggressor.”

At the height of this deconstruction of identity spaces, ethnic shifts transformed, depending on the voting patterns and the geopolitical space. As these spaces were constructed as ethno-identity spaces, Posner (2007, p. 1303) warns that when “… in-group/out-group distinctions are made based on tribal affiliation … [then] each of these distinctions may serve … as potential axes of social differentiation and conflict.”

Warah (2012) corroborates the value of tribalism in Kenyan politics and Roberts (2009, p. 8) rightly observes that “the Kenyan culture is deeply tribal … the average person identifies with the tribe and values the tribe.” In addition, the agrarian economy reifies land ownership (Cussac, in Roberts, 2009, p. 8). Taken together, ethnicity and land ownership both continue to determine conflict in geographic regions that are not only ethno-geographic but also ethnopolitical and psychological spaces.

**WHY IS ETHNOPOLITICS IN KENYA PROBLEMATIC?**

We now explore some of the challenges of ethnopolitics in Kenya. We do this merely to place this discussion in context, rather than to isolate the problem as being unique to it, because different forms of identity politics reinforce conflicts elsewhere, such as in European contexts (Ishiyama & Breuning, 1998). Therefore, the dynamics that give import to ethnopolitics in Kenya include multi-ethnic and multiparty politics and the ephemeral nature of political alignments that makes it difficult to predict how identities shift and transform in the ethnopolitical spaces inherently reified through tribal
identities. These further complicate the identity equation (Posner, 2007) because they demand multilayered levels of political coalitions that become problematic when ethnonational shifts occur. Moreover, the land question, held on capitalist terms, complicates ethnonational politics as citizens can buy land and settle anywhere. All these issues are significant when deconstructing ethnonational politics and identity in Kenya.

Kenya has over 42 different ethnicities which were reified by the ethnically determined geographic boundaries created by British colonial rule (Yieke, 2011). Yet, identity as a psychological space becomes problematic in countries like Kenya where politics is rarely about shared political ideologies but rather about ethnic positioning with respect to access to resources by the community that wins the presidency (Eifert et al., 2010; Posner, 2007). For the presidential vote, the requirement that the winning candidate must garner 51% of a representative vote from all regions of the country triggers political coalitions. Therefore, ethnic kingpins reposition and shift several times prior to the general elections, depending on the inherent communal advantage premised on winning elections.

Gaitho (2012), in his media piece titled “It is the silly season again, so the long divisive tribal knives are out,” gives a preview of the current state of politics as Kenya prepares for elections in March 2013. In Gaitho’s view, tribal divisions and unquestioned loyalty to ethnic kingpins during elections reify or even balkanize identities for politicians’ personal gain. Political coalitions continue to shift and this is likely to continue until the 2013 parliamentary and presidential elections have been concluded. Historically, coalitions have failed to honour memorandums of understanding after winning elections (Dercon & Gutiérrez-Romero, 2010). Consequently, mistrust based on previously failed coalitions has seen politicians shift allegiance from partners they perceive to be untrustworthy. Ethnic groups with large numbers endear themselves to political wooing as they also use their numbers to manipulate potential coalition partners. Such ephemeral political alignments pose a challenge.

It would seem that, in a multicultural context such as Kenya, coalitions like these essentially demand multilayered political alliances. By themselves, coalitions are not a problem, but when ethnic groups that perceive enmity among themselves become the basis for alliances then a big problem is created. Therefore, Gaitho’s observations about ethnic coalitions are relevant because such coalitions also connect to geopolitical spaces. These spaces too have “ethnic identities,” implying indigenized ethnic territories. For example, the Gikuyu live predominantly in Central Kenya, the Kalenjins settled in Rift Valley and the Luo settled in Luo Nyanza. These are not just geographic spaces, but also geopolitical and ethnically constructed spaces.

Relating “foreign” spaces to refugees, Baron (2003, p. 96) notes that “those who are deemed not to belong by virtue of ethnic, linguistic, religious or other ascribed identity in the bounded national space are figurally, sometimes physically, ‘dis-placed.’” Even though these are only spatial spaces, the occupants of such spaces construct them accordingly, using common attributes such as like-kind, kinlike and a sense of belonging that converge to determine the psychological-level construction of such spaces. Such construction of space may explain why Dercon and Gutiérrez-Romero (2010) conclude that the PEV in Kenya was not only about identity, but also had a geographic explanation, as people attacked those whom they perceived to be non-natives, and therefore outsiders in the geopolitical and psychologically constructed spaces.
Fluid ethnopolitical alliances led by faltering politicians confound identity constructions, where citizens rally behind political ethnic chiefs to capture national offices during elections. Therefore, such identity transformation not only constitutes inherently sticky conceptions of ethnicity (cf. Fearon, 2003), but it also makes ethnic identities, even within a similar geographical location, uncertain. Posner (2007, p. 1303) warns that differentiated levels of identity by ethnicity, “within a single country … may serve, in different situations, as potential axes of social differentiation and conflict.”

In Kenya today, individuals hold land on capitalist terms, reinforcing high levels of antagonism. “These socio-economic and political differentiations based on socio-cultural identities such as ethnicity, religion or race, are known as horizontal inequalities” (Stewart, as cited in Muhula, 2009, p.84). Consequently, perceived inequalities in the distribution of resources invariably buttress “out-group” and “in-group” differences among societies (cf. Tajfel & Turner in Romero & Roberts, 1998). Moreover, in Kenya today, as in the past, communities (read ethnicities) have communalized their territories, usually perceived as indigenous even if geographically located. Although there is a campaign to shift the thinking that any Kenyan can settle anywhere, there is no denying that since settlement followed communal lines, it will take time before a full integration can be realized. This static perception of geographical “ownership” of land among different tribes, against the fluid ethnopolitical alignments, continues to undermine unity in the country.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, I problematize the rather transient ethnopolitically derived constructions of ethnic identity in times of national elections as potent triggers of conflict. As illustrated by the ever-changing ethnopolitical realignments for national elections, identity becomes an unsettled space, even among politicians aligned to the same ethnic group or party, as they target ethnic groups as mobilizable units of voters. Relevant questions of identity arise, as politicians move with their ethnic supporters, because ethnicity in Kenya still determines party affiliation and voting decisions (Dercon & Gutiérrez-Romero, 2010; Yieke, 2011). What happens when there is resistance from among some tribesmen? Are ethnic groups necessarily mobilizable? These questions are germane to ethnopolitics in Kenya, but are best understood in the context of a Daily Nation (2012, para. 1-5) reporter’s observation on how “MPs [are] perfecting party hopping tactics”:

As the General Election draws closer, politicians are positioning themselves …

To do this, they have perfected the old art of party hopping … The defections are informed by regional, nay, tribal considerations where politicians must be seen as singing praises of a tribal chieftain lest they lose favour with the electorate …

Those resisting ethnic bandwagon have been receiving threats and intimidation from cheerleaders. They are “enemies” of “our people”.

Noteworthy are the “nested” identities that exist among inter-groups as both spatial and psychological constructs. Perceived from a multi-ethnic context, this is a recipe for chaos, as ethnic communities have settled in spaces other than their own native lands. What do these ethnopolitical identity constructions portend for individuals, groups and the national development agenda? Essentially then, ethnopolitical spaces are never certain until just a few months before the general elections.
Efforts to rebuild a “nation” out of the PEV experience continue to heighten Kenyan’s consciousness. These include the promulgation of a new constitution in 2010, which decentralizes power from the president, as well as the formation of the National Cohesion and Reconciliation Commission aimed at reconciling Kenyans. Efforts that target the psyche include an emphasis on nationhood, and “we-ness” through media campaigns using slogans such as “Najivuniakuwa Mkenya” (I am proud to be Kenyan), which focus on what it means to be Kenyan. Whether such campaigns will have the desired effect remains to be determined after the March 2013 general elections.

Finally, the nested discourse between ethnopolitics and identity conceals regional dynamics that trigger and uphold the intensity and duration of tribal animosity in context. After all, Hook (2004b, p. 89), borrowing from Fanon, values context in deconstructing issues related to identity:

Indeed, for Fanon one cannot take up psychological questions, such as questions of identity, outside the consideration of their specific social, historical, political and economic contexts. These contexts are so much part of an individual … the individual does not exist apart from such contexts.

In line with Hook’s suggestion, this paper explored the nexus between identity and ethnopolitics within the context of the rather transient ethnic and clientelistic national elections, to highlight some of the issues germane to ethnopolitics in Kenya that might not apply to other contexts. In addition, it has demonstrated that although ethnopolitics exists as a near universal phenomenon, the intra-context triggers vary. The value of this discourse is to appreciate that, although ethnopolitics is common, different regional dynamics prevail. In Kenya, conflict over scarce resources, perceived disadvantage among some ethnic groups, ethnic diversity, shifting political alignments, and clientelistic voting are some of the paradigms for evaluating identity and ethnopolitics as inherent dynamics that might vary according to context.

REFERENCES


Chapter 21

Theorizing community in and through Third Way ‘alternative’ praxis: A critical psychological analysis

Giouli Tsirtoglou

Clinical Psychologist, Athens, Greece

SUMMARY

The rise of the NGO sector in Greece changed the way psychosocial expertise and communities relate with each other. NGO’s impact on communities is monitored, registered and evaluated through official processes and this is one of the ways communities are turned into seamless, coherent objects of study and intervention under neoliberal governance. Reflecting on our praxis working with communities we came to realize how our viewpoints and impacts on them were at the same time excessively promoted and obscured in the NGO objectifying practices. Hence, what we shall critically introduce and explore here are: (a) the conditions under which the notion of community, as a psychosocial concept, is legitimized and serves the legitimization of Third Way “alternative” social policies, (b) the meaning the notion of community acquires in the context of such social practice and finally (c) the way the notion of community mediates the social scientist’s subjectivity in the framework of Critical Psychology.

COMMUNITY MEDIATING SUBJECTIVITY

The concept of “community” serves to designate a socio-cultural contextualization of behavior/conduct such as communality (Tovey, 2009), sociality (Studdert, 2005) and intersubjectivity (MacIntyre, 2012). As such the abstraction “community” is useful for further analysis and research when it delineates alternative approaches (e.g., being open to theories of socialisation or communication etc.). Still, of such a concept should also be demanded that it be “fertile” in the sense of outlining it as being the result or the object of people’s activities, knowledges, institutionalizing efforts, of social networking, etc. Yet, even this is not enough either. What is also demanded is the reference to the effects which such an objectified product has in turn on collectives and individuals (e.g., beneficiaries, community workers, vulnerable social groups etc.). Taking these demands seriously, we might achieve a dialectic understanding of “the ways in which that abstraction is alive as a material reality, objectified in institutional structures and knowledges, and in turn forms collectivities and disciplines subjectivities” (Nissen, 2008, p. 62).

The issues discussed here had been critically analyzed in the context of a previous research project with my colleague Fanis Dedes on the (trans)formation of subjectivity in the provision of psychosocial services in Greece under neoliberal psychosocial policies. Our research object emerged from our praxis working in the NGO sector, as neophyte psychologists, for a community, called Finikas, running the high risk of social exclusion due to socioeconomic vulnerabilities. This means that the research object was not “given” to us but formed in the course of our active participation in the NGO psychosocial practice, having a particular position. Thus, we developed this research as
an attempt to work out the social ends of the means of our own productive involvement. Facing the preliminary and imperative questions “working for whom?” and “which is the impact of our work to ourselves and others?” we sought for the materialization of a dual intention: the critical reflection on the meaning of our work as a social practice on the one hand and the development of our working potency on the other.

Drawing on Critical Psychological theory and practice then appeared as a mere necessity not only because of the way “subjectivity” is theorized in this field, but also because of the way our work was lived as a praxis-research project, in the order of subjectification-objectification dialectics. While we were trying to work properly and conscientiously and constantly asking ourselves “what are we doing then?” “the two determinations, that subjectivity consists of” (Nissen, 2002) were becoming more and more obvious to us: (a) “the subjectivity of labour, or praxis” as the means of forming and transforming the societal living conditions and (b) the inescapable way of realizing our work through “intersubjectivity” where subjects develop in “relations of possibility” through and in the form of objectified societal meanings. So, working in this context could be seen as a circular pattern of action and reflection—ideally in the order of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and planning again. In this pattern, which could not surprisingly lead into a vicious circle, subject’s personal introspections manifest themselves as possible and negotiable recognitions or negations of the subject itself or of the meaning that s/he echoed until then. Hopefully, then, working on the basis of a “cooperative introspection” (Nissen, 2000), as we did for the needs of this research also, would serve the transformation of a forced cooperation to a willful societal engagement.

In this cooperative introspection we provoked and accompanied one another—approaching also what Pierre Bourdieu called a “provoked and accompanied self-analysis” (Hamel, 1997)—so that both of us reflected critically on our working experiences and activities with relevance to societal structures and practices—not only as colleagues but as research subjects and co-researchers too. Taking our praxis as a situated encounter between subjects, activities and objects (material objects and subjects objectified) that participated in the context of this particular NGO social practice we analyzed thoroughly each other’s interactions with these subjects hoping that we come a bit closer to the way where the personal everyday perspective of the subject associates with the perspective of society. Inevitably, we came to realize that any critical reflection on our agency as community workers should also include a more sustained look on community as a mediating subject and object, realized and transformed in and through subjectivity.

Sketching the “portrait of the practice” (Nissen, 2000) as interactions between ourselves and the other subjects that participated in this practice became more and more relevant to our job’s core method, which is the intersubjective relationship between the provider and the recipient of the service. In our perspective these subjects were the NGO’s administrator, the children of the community, their parents, the local authorities of the community, our co-workers in the context of the NGO as well as in the context of transnational partnerships and the European authorities. In the context of these interactions we delineated our working routines, our duties, the challenges we faced and the content of our work, along with the meaning that all these bore for us and those that we were working with, the other subjects that is, trying to disclose a “prototype” (Nissen, 2009) of our praxis development. In doing so we felt bound to comprehend the relevance of the particularities of the local social context to “life trajectories” in a personal and historical perspective (Dreier, 1999).
THE LOCAL CONTEXT

When we conducted this research—two years before the beginning of the economic crisis in Greece—the NGO sector could be considered as a thriving socioeconomic sphere. Therein large, medium and small national or international organizations and corporations “played” in the social arena of an imperfect competition, which was primarily affected by the personal and political affairs over the state’s or the European Union’s funds.

The NGO that we worked for was of a medium “stature” maintaining branches in four Greek cities and one in Albania, even though it was facing ups and downs in terms of funding and personnel. We saw this pattern of irregularity, indicative of the general precarious terms under which its activity was being realized, as one of the cohering components which (trans)form the NGO practice as a “model artifact” (Nissen, 2009). Other components would be: the longstanding tenure of the founding members at the helm of its activity, as pioneers associated with the “common good”; the accentuation of a principal more or less utopian aim like combating social exclusion; the use of adaptable means (tools) for the realization of its aims, that is the provision of counseling, educational, recreational and socializing opportunities; the continual search for funding sources (reproduction means) that could be of national or European agencies along with the “in kind contribution” of local administration actors; and last but not least the expansion of the organization in the form of various units (Youth Centers, Hostels for the Homeless, etc.) aspiring to secure or enhance a bit more the funding opportunities.

So, both of us worked for the only Youth Centre founded especially for the needs of Finikas community. Finikas is located at Thessaloniki’s margins, to its northeast end, and was established, in the early 1960s, under the auspices of a special project for the restitution of people living in temporary hutments. Since then Finikas was legitimized as a social housing district, inhabited by low income, working class, extended families and in more or less irregular and occasional manner still needs a “project to be.”

The Youth Centre was established with the contribution of the municipality, the local authority of the greater area, which provided the place of 120 m², to accommodate the needs of the young people from 7 to 22 years old. Every day at least eighty youths visited the Youth Centre hoping to find an interesting way to spend their time. For us, though, the NGO’s representatives, the Youth Centre should also be able to “accommodate” the priorities of the projects that funded its operation—meaning that if the priorities of the funding project favoured educational workshops on “interculturality” then we had to find a way to make this priority meet the needs of the youths by adjusting their needs to the priority.

In this context, our working routines were intertwined, our duties overlapped and our working tasks exceeded both the locality of Finikas’ community and what we reasonably anticipated to be the core content of our work, Finikas’ community empowerment that is. What we came across was loads of paper work, consecutive meetings, contacts and negotiations with national and transnational partners and agencies, traveling within borders and abroad. What we also had to face were unpredictable working and payment shifts and lack of insurance. All these taken together meant for us anything but a well contained and fixed working context; rather, they constantly allowed for the eruption of what one may term “precarious margins,”
the semantic field where the meaning of our work was being materialized and reconstructed under the semi-explicit terms of hope and hopelessness, investment and divestment, power and powerlessness, construction and deconstruction.

This precariously open spectrum of potencies and restrictions from the beginning until the end was for us a great opportunity to work with relevance to our studies and our critical stance towards the mainstream psychology of pure individualism. But it was also the only opportunity that a psychologist normally has, in Greece, to enter the job market when s/he has no other relevant working experience or a relevant postgraduate degree. Likewise, from our initial commitment until our last report, community as the critical recipient and analytic category of our work—certainly experienced and conceived as something exceeding instrumental cooperation or social bonding—was desirable and gratifying. But it was also something demanded and demanding to the point that it also became difficult to develop or to cope with for long, especially when coming closer and closer to the economic crisis in Greece.

**PARTICIPATING IN THE NGO OBJECTIFYING PRACTICE**

For the last three decades psychosocial services, NGO practices and community were discursively connected, in a “Third Way” gray zone between market and state (Rose, 1999), right and left (Driver & Martell, 2000), liberalism and socialism (Studdert, 2005). Third Way advocates proposed forms of active, productive, and participating welfare, inherently and unbreakably bonded, and discursively intertwined with the local, community component. New legitimizing strategies and partnerships of all sorts were asserted and accorded a key role in the reform of welfare to welfare-to-work projects. Welfare—to-work projects which are quite usually conceived as the stick and the carrot in work policy, according to Nicolas Rose “deploy a mixture of remoralizing therapies, pedagogies for inculcating citizenship competencies, and punitive measures” (Rose, 2001, p. 13). According to Nicolas Rose (2001, pp. 4-5) we find in this “an attempt to create some novel links between the personal and the political […] a new politics of behavior,” which he calls “ethopolitics” and outlines in the following way:

The Third Way aspires to a contract between those who exercise power and those who are obliged to be its subjects. Although the former must provide the conditions of the good life, the latter must deserve to inhabit it by building strong communities and exercising active responsible citizenship. (2001, p. 3)

In this political schema, community serves as a discourse construct valued in an instrumental way for what it could produce. That is social cohesion and social embedding in a voluntaristic manner. Free and autonomous individuals can be governed through community, in the here and now. Thus, in such “alternative” practice community is legitimized—all the way from the top—“as an instrumental cockpit for the enactment of objectified, rational and frequently psychologised ‘means and ends,’ as a fabricated object for the enactment of individual subjectivities and pre-conceived projects” (Studdert, 2005, p. 105).

In this landscape we could easily speak of the NGO’s ideological leverage in legitimizing social injustice along with psychology’s power of victimizing the socially injured, through the so called “ameliorative interventions” (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005)—and one could be well aware of this. However, such a line of argument could as easily lead us to bottom line verdicts—for example “eventually, our work did or did not serve the one or the other reproduction end, for the one or the other body of power etc.”
This would inevitably beget community’s cynical ostracism, as a subject/ agent, on behalf of which our psychosocial services were being realized. For us, though, in a sea of mediations, this recipient remained the most foundational: by affirming and resisting, by legitimizing such a social practice in certain ways, by constructing subjectivity and sociality as activities among subjects.

For us to work for the community—and thus acting in the community context—was being experienced as a “tug-of-war” of demands and investments, between the providers and the recipients of psychosocial community work. Instead of conceiving it purely externally either as a “buffer zone” (Kivel, 2000) for the demands of the oppressed or as a support practice for the treatment of social fragmentation, working in such a community context rather involved what our colleague Stavros Psaroudakis (2008) has described as “symbiosis of precarities,” meaning: the constant abrasion and the imperative conciliation, traction and coalition, in the social field, along with intersubjective mutual understanding, between the neophyte precarious NGO worker and the precarious neophyte recipient. This symbiotic micro interaction, through which community was being realized, was a condition of a social potential versus alienation, exploitation, oppression and rights’ deprivation and at the same time a circumscription of the subjects involved.

The general context of this psychosocial inconsistency was given by the projects and the funding determinants. This determination, although precarious, was at the same time an opportunity for us to engage in the community's matters, as working subjects, apart from making a kind of living. What had been at stake was the meaning that all this attention and funds would attain for the community itself. In other words, what we did not know was the form of community that this social determination would produce, or the way community would participate in this nexus of interactivities in order to constitute itself as “acting subject.” A project for the community was a change of the community—but a change in which direction?

To the community the project signified something that lay between a benefit, an opportunity and a right. Ideally community should gain some kind of inherent awareness of the fact that there was an opportunity to benefit from a privileged conjuncture that somebody was there to help it exercise some of its rights. What seemed to us to be rather the case, though, was that community needed our support in order to exercise its “meta-right of access to rights,” a right almost exclusively legitimized by and enacted through projects like ours. In other words, we should channel our work, that is the project, into the community in the form of a preferential opportunity, as if we were “redressing a grievance” that we ourselves, mediated by the project, were contributing to.

Community thus was a prerequisite, a consequence and a “parallel casualty” of our work. In terms of practice this meant that while formulating and realizing the project we found ourselves in the position of having to state loud and clear that we weren’t just working for the beneficiaries’ community consciousness, by combating social exclusion, but that a “minimum of community consciousness” was already at place also! Thus, part of our psychosocial/community work was not just the establishment of bonds between the community’s residents, but the reestablishment of the present bonds as “community bonds” also.

So, we could say that the kind of community consciousness that we worked for was a “project community consciousness,” a community consciousness not for itself but for the project. The project was a meeting point as well as a “tool” (mediation method),
common for the NGO as well as the community. Yet, the relationship between those two poles of the project was an incommensurate one: on the one hand there was the sensitized Civil Society mediated by the experts’ work, and on the other hand there was the community of the socially excluded, that it is not even a community, and it needed all these mediations in order to be one.

All these, of course, could not be further developed if one did not take into account the particular meaning that the concept of community acquires in Greece, in its relation to the local authorities. In Greece, the concept of community does not savor the widespread use or the social resonance that it has in countries like the U.K. or the U.S.A. and some other western European countries. We could reasonably argue that it is being contended by the (concept of the) “local government” (“topiki autodiikisi” in Greek, which literal translation is “local self-administration”), which mainly has administrative power and proportional social meaning. The “local government,” unlike “community,” in a way by-passes people as communities with common traits, interests or concerns and appeals to the locally governed, that in Greek is named “dimotis,” in a more or less individualistic manner. The “dimotis” position is basically a political position, relative to that of the citizen/“politis.” This introduces a great inconsistency before the great value that the social environment, more or less construed as community, is ascribed. The same applies to the myriad of normally transient initiatives, that someday were appreciated as transformative having the function of articulating to the state citizens’ demands which elsewhere would be described as “community demands.”

These formations, the “dimotis” position and the institutional micro-centralization of welfare responsibilities to the local government, can and often do discourage the emergence and the establishment of communities within which social issues could or would be formed and confronted. Districts or groups of people that mostly need such a community context feel a growing impotence. These people hold the “dimotis” position but due to socioeconomic conditions are vulnerable and under the sovereignty of the individualizing relationship “dimotis-local government” get further weakened. This is also an aspect of the distinction between “dimotis-politis” and the residents who due to social exclusion become communities under the adhesive predicates of “vulnerability.” Eventually, society is relegated to community, and community is reduced to the “specifically private.”

In this complex of practices—the EU, the NGO, the local government—it appears that Finikas’ community, participated as an objectified versatile subject having multiple “owner-ships,” which may compete over it, and which can be differentiated in terms of their degree of institutionalization. Moreover it appears that community’s social grammar that we were realizing through this complex of funds was not to be taken for granted, but only as a derivative of the project’s performative power. Community is, to some extent, objectified through the project’s mediation but also for the project’s needs. And this quasi-administrative, bio-political process exemplifies tacitly what empowerment is about: an inconsistent modality of power. Whether community would transcend the project, to what extent and how was and still remains at stake, as well as a foundational criterion of our psychosocial work.

Community, in order to gain the opportunity, in the form of a special project, to fight over the procurement of special benefits, ought to manifest its special characteristics—such as cohesion (or the lack of it), (insufficient) participation, vulnerability etc. This of course was part of our job; as a matter of fact, this was the main precondition in order to
“keep” our job as well as keep the opportunity we had to work for the community. In turn, “sitting on top” of a cross-section of a variously special(-ized) situation, we were expected to deal with “catalyzing special effects.” Not only should we work as special scientists, but as “special citizens” as well, capable of being included in “special communities.”

On the other hand, we came to realize that this subjectivity of “specialization” was being objectified to the following consensus: the provision of any psychosocial service is considered to be the main psychosocial service. This meant that what counted was that some intervention was at place, and that the specific content of it was of less importance. Consensus around this point was to some extent justified given the overall circumstances and indicative of the fact that “anything else” for the district nourished hope for “something good,” “something more.” So community was expected and encouraged to responsibly participate just to keep the opportunity of something good to be done there. Likewise, the relationship with the community involved an aspect of edification, a community “learning by example,” which promoted and at the same time constricted community’s activation in terms of the model provided by the activation per se of the NGO workers, and only then in terms of their specific action.

In the same way that our activation/activity constituted a transference of “practical hope” to the community that a new project will follow, our active attendance was for the young beneficiaries as subjects a “wire” to a well enough different world; the world that Boltanski and Chiappello (2005, p. 103) called “the reticular world.” And the merest of our psychological interventions had to do with a growing of sensitivity for the discernment, the recognition and the practical keeping pace with such a world’s tendencies and demands, rather than with the resolution of emotional or behavioral problems, the abolition of inequality, the perspectives’ enhancement and expression. In this perspective the Youth Center was a preventive “inoculation” against an impending “lethal incompatibility.”

On the other hand, though this “lethal incompatibility” threatened not only the socially excluded youth but also those out of work and those working or trying to work under new conditions; rightly speaking, the community as a whole. What we experienced were young and elders competing with one another regarding the Youth Center’s use. The Youth Center did not signify just something for the youth, but a place within which “youth” was produced and distributed, as a historically new and unevenly distributed social good (Marvakis, 2005). We could quite reasonably see the discourse about competence building, which so explicitly guided our practices, such as counseling, non-formal education, and workshops, as a process for the development of “youth competences.” These youth contents that the globalized projects and psychosocial services aim at, focusing merely on the formation of dispositions which will let some of them attain the “maximum possible maturity,” the positive social roles of the active citizen, the lifelong learner, the non-discontented precarious worker.

**REFLECTING ON REFLECTIONS**

All the way through these reflections what was triggering our minds was an inherent need to find community bits or beats in the erratic NGO working regime. What we think we managed to outline is subjectifying and objectifying processes and interactivities which set the ground for the “plea” of “community” as an analytic category well-suited
for the actuation of hope and mutual investment in psychosocial work as a setting for personal/social reproduction.

Working in and on this setting we “realized” again and again the mutually corroborated sense between workers and beneficiaries that anything beneficial for them was also, in its depth, beneficial for the market and that anything pressing and laborious had to do with the market’s regulations. In this correlation, the relationship between the worker and the direct or indirect beneficiary, is produced in terms of investment: the worker’s investment (investment of work and tolerance to cooperation) meets the beneficiary’s investment (investment of participation or tolerance) and is being experienced by both of them as participation in a “psychomoral” economy which we couldn’t call better than “mutual micro-blackmailing” and “micro-blackmailing of mutuality.” Both worker and beneficiary fight in a more or less cliental transaction of the form “if you don’t give that you will be responsible for our—that is the project’s—collapse.” They fight for the so-called “best practice,” which practically means forcing one another to the maximum of self-investment hoping that the minimum reproduction of oneself is to be accomplished for both.

Taking all these reflections into account we could argue that a dual need was inherently puzzling our minds: the need to realize the transformation of community’s meaning under neoliberal joint ventures of practices on the one hand and doing this to come a step closer to prefiguring “better communities” on the other. Apparently, then, what we think we should ask ourselves is to what extent reflecting on communities make us, i.e., those who are reflecting gain the conviction that we also promote bonds between people. And to what extent avoiding, or not going as far as prefiguring “better communities,” allows more space for bonds to grow. Yet, the question of “how?” we can have better communities cannot be isolated from the question “why?” we don’t already have them.

REFERENCES


Chapter 22

Working with autism across contexts: Theoretical considerations on community and state/private sector employment

Electra Anagnostopoulou
Developmental Psychologist, Athens, Greece

SUMMARY

This paper takes up considerations on community across working contexts from “the first person perspective” (Nissen, 2004). Considering research as “intersubjective” and “critical psychological practice research as an approach from within and from below” (Nissen, 2009), I will share my subjective standpoint departing from my personal working experience. I will refer to this experience across two contexts: governmental—or, rather, semi-privatized—mental health care services for autism in the Netherlands and private psychological services, “centers,” for autism in Greece. The issue being problematized is how these contexts pose themselves as communities and how the subjects act within the community. The emphasis is on the dialectic interaction process between the subjects and the community and on how the subject gives meaning to this process. My intention is not to address questions providing answers, but rather to focus on the process of critical reflection and how it can lead the subject and the community to transcend the current linear perception of their relationality.

REFLECTING ON THE NOTION OF COMMUNITY ACROSS CONTEXTS: STATE/SEMI-PRIVATIZED AUTISM SERVICES IN THE NETHERLANDS AND PRIVATE CENTERS FOR AUTISM IN GREECE

There are several theoretical conceptions about community. Durkheim (1997/1893) speaks of living in groups with a sense of collective identity in a “mechanical” or unreflective sort of way, through simple recognition of sameness. Tönnies (1957/1887) refers to forms of human association, using the concepts “Gemeinschaft” and “Gesellschaft”; he emphasizes the set of relationships (varying from emotional cohesion to contractual and rational aspects of social relationships) in particular patterns of settlement and in particular geographical places. Bell and Newby (1976) identify four dimensions: community in a “topographical” sense, as a “local social system,” as “communion” or “communality,” and in an “ideological” sense. It seems that most conceptions converge to two main perspectives: “one which understands community as local and relates it to ‘place’ as a source of collective identity and a site for collective action and another which focuses on community primarily as a form of social ‘bonding’ or social relationship” (Tovey, 2009). Both contexts I have worked in can be seen from this dual perspective of community. However, what is at stake is the meaning that the transcendence of this duality acquires.

In my everyday routine at both contexts, I was quickly confronted with the hierarchical structure that lies beneath the social bonding. Working in the community of
autism services in the Netherlands, I had to follow the guidelines of the policy maker. In my every day praxis this meant for me to fulfill the following role: I had to assess the child and argue in favor of this or the other diagnosis, and then I would support the family and provide them with knowledge in order to learn to get along with the (autistic) child. There was a clear hierarchy and power difference. The child and family (the client) were the lowest in the rank, the so called ignorant and helpless; they didn’t know what was going on with their child and they needed help. Me as a psychologist stood above them as the so called professional, the expert in autism; I held the power of knowledge and clinical experience. Above me in the hierarchy stood the policy maker, the one deciding on the conditions as well as the content of my work, and at the same time the one mediating the opportunity to practice my profession. This hierarchical structure strengthened the dependency relations which had initially emerged. A certain learning process established itself: I learned from my supervisor/manager, who gave me the know-how and feedback, and then, in turn, the client was learning from me. This therapeutic trajectory was taking place in a certain place, my office in the autism unit, at a certain time, the session, on a certain way, according to the psychoeducation method. At a first glance this therapeutic procedure seems a “profession-centered service, in which professionals more or less monopolize interventions and interpretations and, thus, misconstrue and lose sight of many of their clients’ activities and interpretations” (Dreier, 2003).

However, this linearity of learning, which followed a linearity of role hierarchy, did not exhaust the interactions I was involved in that community setting. While working with an autistic child and his parents, one of the problems was the child’s cravings, a side effect of the medical treatment. The parents had already consulted a great amount of office sessions and advice. But only after a series of visits at their home I started experiencing an interaction process that went beyond the hierarchy of the expert and the one needing help. “Autism” as a concept became less prominent and gave its place to the particular autistic child as a subject of the activity/treatment. The parents at the same time turned into the experts of the conditions and of the child’s uniqueness of character—which is the core content of my work—while we were configuring the activity/treatment. The parents came up with a creative idea: the candy project. They used the child’s special interest for coupons, his urge to keep things under his control and his loyalty trait. The child was responsible for exchanging three coupons a day with a candy and keeping track of the coupon use. It worked perfectly. At this point I was learning from the parents and I was experiencing the autistic thinking, feeling and acting of the child.

The learning process or psychoeducation, which was supposed to be guided by me as an expert towards the client was taking place not on the previous linear, hierarchical way but on a dynamic way, through and across interaction processes. Who was the expert now? The professional, the parents, or the child? What actually happened there were a small but clear destabilization of the static hierarchy and an interruption of the power positions. Thus, community is now realized in terms of horizontality. This horizontality can be seen as a constant power shift between subjects who constantly mediate one another and constantly transfer and reclaim their personal loads as community workload.

After some time of this dynamic and dialectical interaction, the parents asked to stop the counseling, because they felt strong enough to configure ways to get along together as a family. My manager interpreted this move as a success of mine as a professional,
and was glad to pass me on the next client from the waiting list and to put a plus point on the productivity scale of my evaluation. For my manager in Greece though (the owner of the autism center I worked for) such an outcome would be interpreted as a failure of my professional capacity to keep the client into the therapeutic process and as a minus point on the productivity scale, as new clients had to be recruited.

On this account, we could easily speak of scientific, socio-cultural or socio-economic particularities or relativities, regarding the way the psychological services are being organized as a social practice, or as a community of practice. However, what is also interesting to problematize here is the criteria under which somebody is legitimized to participate in, or to be excluded from, such a community. Neither the place, nor the social bonding seems to meet the case. On the contrary, what seems to mediate everybody's participation or exclusion is a kind of self-interest.

Up to now, I have argued that the subjects’ action and interaction process play a profound role, as they question the structure and the notion of community. Looking back at the notion of community as a place where subjects share interests (autism) and at my one-dimensional criticism of my role, the hierarchy and the power difference lying beneath, I discovered a process that goes beyond these static views. The community goes through dialectic interaction processes run by the subjects themselves and their constantly moving intentionality. It is the potential of this intentionality—unpredictable and in constant motion—which is important, because it questions and changes the community’s position and existence, as well as our notion of it, all the time.

**CRITICAL REFLECTION ON THE NOTION AND POSITION IN PRESENT CAPITALIST RESTRUCTURING: SURPASSING THE BLOCKADE OF COMMUNITY’S COHESION AND SYNERGY**

Taking a step further, this constantly moving intentionality of the subjects undermines the community’s cohesion and synergy. These two concepts of cohesion and synergy were being widely used within both communities I have worked in. They were mainly used by the policy makers or owners in order to propagate the idea that managers, workers and clients all have the same aim, which is to help people with autism, and work together to achieve it. This humanistic discourse is quite common within the present capitalist restructuring, that is, neoliberalism.

Taking a closer look at how cohesion and synergy emerge from the policy makers and why they are being propagated in the community, I can discern similar procedures in both contexts in the Netherlands and in Greece: Neoliberal policies turn state health care services into privatized services, as capitalism moves from the leftovers of the welfare state to the free market. In order to survive in the free market—where the highest possible profit is sought at the lowest possible cost—what these private services need is an idea—the humanistic vision of helping people in need—that keeps the subjects working together (cohesion) devoted on the same aim (synergy).

One example illustrating this in practice is the supervision given by the owner/policy maker to the worker about the client. In both communities, it was my employer who at the same time supervised me, evaluated my work and gave guidelines for the client’s own good. The recipient—that is me or us as a team of colleagues—was at the same time the professional worker, the employee, the learner. The third participant of the community, the client, was absent as a subject from this process and was turned into an object in this discussion about or for him/her. In such circumstances I felt the moral of
“working all together for the same aim” (cohesion and synergy) sounded rather hollow, as I could not perceive community as an independent existence free from the way the subjects associate to one another. As Marx and Engels (1970/1845) put it: The community in which individuals always take on an independent existence in relation to them is not only a completely illusory community, but a new fetter as well, since it is the combination of the one class over against the other. In terms of practice this meant that a supervision meeting was nothing more than just something more, perfectly suitable to the overall intensified workload, in order to create the illusion that a politically correct psychosocial working community was accomplished. The fact that the clients became present only through the workers’ references is also indicative of the fact that such a community was a community “under suspension.” In turn, the necessity of such a cohesion and synergy, although normally flexible, set itself as a limit to the articulation of other kinds of relationality and bonding, such as solidarity.

This way of thinking criticizes the present function of community and also the neoliberal policies. But this criticism is all too easy. It is easy and quite common to theoretically turn the present models down and also to theoretically fantasize and argue in favor of a different idea. However what is at stake is what the subject actually does in the present conditions towards another direction. There will follow two examples—always from the “first person perspective” (Nissen, 2004)—to illustrate this.

In the community of mental health care in the Netherlands, talking with colleagues at one of our usual after work coffee meetings, we somehow started sharing our concerns about what we called ethical dilemmas in our current psychosocial work. We quickly found out that these dilemmas were connected to the present model imposed at work, the so called Diagnosis Treatment Combination model. (According to this model when a client comes for an intake, he/she first goes through a diagnostic procedure and then receives treatment only after getting an official DSM-IV diagnosis. The model is imposed the last years in order to estimate how much treatment of specific problems costs, to promote evidence-based methods and to establish treatment protocols per diagnosis. This was applied in the time of free market rules, when state health care services were being gradually privatized, getting financed to a large extent by private health insurance companies, and becoming concurrent of one another). We also found out that our dilemmas were connected to the labor intensification, as there was no time and space to reflect on work’s content. Together with the colleagues—although we didn’t share the same ideology and interpretation about why this was happening—we set a common goal: to bring up the theme ethic dilemma’s, as we named it, in the community. By working as a team and organizing discussion meetings and writings we came together with a number of people who shared such concerns and wanted to do something about it. It is worth mentioning that the participants were not only workers, juniors and also seniors in high rank positions with theoretical work, but clients as well. In this dynamic trajectory emerged another sort of cohesion and synergy in this small community in the community. A feeling of strength and creativity was released by us, as subjects who associated to each other from rather equitable positions, and by our collective activity: “In a real community the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association” (Marx & Engels, 1970/1845, p. 83).

What this community in the community actually does is to approach a matter that concerns the subjects despite their diversity and differences. It is not about solving a problem, it is about searching together what this problem is and what it means for the subjects. This way, the subjects actually initiate a way of thinking and acting which is
different than what was common within the community up to now. Potentially this process can lead subjects to break with the established structure and function of the present community. It might even lead them to form a new community, connected to their desires, ideas and dreams and to the concerns of society. This can be a way the subjects surpass the present blockade of cohesion and synergy in the community: by deconstructing the present notion of cohesion and synergy in capitalist structures, even by deconstructing the present community and by rebuilding the community and redefining the concept of cohesion and synergy through their new collective and equitable relational trajectory.

Another example of what the subject actually does in the present conditions towards another direction comes from the time I worked in the private autism center in Greece. In a time of austerity measures applied by a strict neoliberal policy, I participated on the general strike, yet none of the other employees did. At the same time I felt guilty about canceling the sessions. There is a common discourse in the community whether it is ethical right for the psychosocial worker to cancel the treatment session of someone being in need, which was accentuated by my boss. On the other hand my “going on strike” action was not just something personal. It was strongly connected to the community, as the strike demanded, among other things, no cuts off at the health sector, no privatization of the common wealth, free public social services, decent salaries, better quality of the services etc. The day after, at work, for the first time my colleagues and I got into a discussion about the strike, the general economic-political situation and the way it affected our community. I realized that my action triggered a new communication process between the subjects, seen not only in the content of the discussion but mainly in the way we communicated, the latter characterized by solidarity and the building up of collective consciousness. What was left afterwards was this small but clear change in our interdependent relational processes and a small grade of freedom within it.

CONFIGURING WAYS TOWARDS A CHANGE IN PRAXIS AND IN THEORY

There is a striking difference in the sort of subject’s collective activities in those two examples. The difference has to do with the inconsistencies within the two communities and the inconsistencies of the capitalist restructuring in which they exist. In the first case: The present capitalist restructuring in the Netherlands applies neoliberal policies in a socio-economic situation which was based on a well build welfare state. This means that, despite the stepwise demolition of the welfare state and the cut offs in the state services, the standard of living is still relatively good. This achieved level of living in combination with the integration of labor/union movement, the absence of other political movements the past decades and the Dutch mentality of consensus forming (the so called polder mentality), has reduced political actions and the political discourse in general. People still have concerns though. They are concerned about the social circumstances, the cultural development, the environmental problems etc. In this context logically emerged this sort of collective activity: the “ethics initiative” (as we named it) which has a socio-cultural character. In the second case in Greece, the discussion about the strike has an economic-political character. The present capitalist restructuring in Greece applies strict neoliberal policies in a socio-economic situation where the living standard was already relatively low and the welfare state has never
really existed. At the same time there is a long history of labor movement, student
movement, political activism and a mentality of political involvement (in terms of
action or discourse). Therefore the subjects’ collective activity “discussing about the
strike” fits in this context.

This comparison is not made to judge whether one action is more radical than the
other, but rather to accentuate the existence of inconsistencies within both communities
and contexts. As subjects in the Greek psychosocial community we found ourselves just
talking about the strike and not collectively participating, while as subjects in the Dutch
psychosocial community we addressed the ethical dilemmas to the community without
questioning the ethical dilemmas of the community itself. Yet a strike would be quite
radical in the health sector in the Netherlands, while an ethic initiative would be radical
in the Greek community of psychosocial workers.

What is however interesting is that the subject, in both contexts, finds a way to act
towards something else than the established practices. This signals a change in the way
subject and community mediate one another. Potentially this could bring a change in the
structure and essence of the community and interdependently a change in the praxis and
the theory. What is still at stake is in which direction subjects and the community—
mediated by their constantly moving intentionality—will evolve through their dialectic
interaction. The question is how, under which inconsistencies, the community in the
community will give meaning to its unpredictability and will turn it into a material
reality. At that point what will be at stake is which new, more genuine, forms of
community, cohesion and synergy will be possible through this new material reality.

REFERENCES

of new urban politics. In D. Herbert & R. Johnston (Eds.), Social areas in cities (pp. 189-207).
Chichester: Wiley & Sons.
Press.
Tovey, H. (2009). Theorising “Community”. In C. Forde, E. Kiely, & R. Meade (Eds.), Youth and
community work in Ireland: Critical perspectives (pp. 81-104). Dublin: Blackhall Publishing.
Chapter 23

Is the discourse on extremism an extremist discourse?

Andrea Kleeberg-Niepage

_Humboldt-University, Berlin_

**SUMMARY**

Political and religious extremism is currently seen as one of the top dangers to social peace worldwide. In trying to explain how and why people turn to extremist ideas psychologists and other social scientists often create a discourse of individual problems, weakness and psychopathology. Therefore, labeling someone as an “extremist” means a total exclusion of such an individual from the world of the majority. This paper explores the criteria upon which opinions or ideas are defined as “extremist” and how these are depending on context and time. By example of right wing extremism current research will be discussed in terms of which individual dispositions it holds responsible for becoming an “extremist.” Beyond such focus on the individual which falls short of explaining or even preventing a phenomenon like “extremism”, alternative approaches will be suggested which understand “extremism” as a result of social discourses and power relations.

**INTRODUCTION**

Extremism, or people with extremist ideas, is currently considered one of the top dangers to social peace worldwide. For some decades now research has tried to explain how and why people become extremists or terrorists and how this could be prevented or at least discovered in time.

Since 9/11/2001 it became very obvious that extremism is a global phenomenon and no longer confined to national territories. Extremists’ attacks are only to a lesser extent aimed at damaging a certain nation state or a national government. More frequently they are directed against “a system,” “a culture,” or “a religion.” At the same time extremist or terrorist groups are no longer organizations in the proper sense, but multinational, permanently changing and moving “networks” instead (Horgan, 2005). That is why scientists, when attempting to explain extremisms or extremist behavior, are to some extent theorizing under new conditions. But how do scientists, and specifically psychologists, actually research extremism?

Based on my research on the question why especially young people in Germany are attracted to extreme rightwing ideas, I will show that the scientific and political discourses on extremism promote an idea of extremism as a phenomenon coming from the periphery of society and as a result of individual problems or dispositions. I will explore the criteria upon which opinions, ideas and people are defined as “extremist” and how current research investigates the question of how and why people become (rightwing) extremists. Finally, I’ll suggest alternative approaches to the phenomenon, which explain “rightwing extremism” as the result of social discourses and power relations; and therefore as a phenomenon which originates from the center of society, not primarily from its margins.
THE DISCOURSE ON EXTREMISM

What is extremism?

When we hear the words extremism or terrorism we often have certain pictures in mind, such as the explosion of cars or buildings, the burning of flags or religious books, violent demonstrations, hidden camps where young men are taught how to fight, or video taped messages through which groups and organizations announce their intention to fight against something or somebody. Are all these examples of extremist incidents? Or could such events also be considered as fighting for freedom, fighting against evil, or as collateral damage in the interests of a higher goal? It seems obvious that interpretation here depends on the eye of the beholder. One should keep this in mind when looking at the criteria which, in politics, the media, and in science, are widely agreed upon as defining opinions or actions as “extremist.” These criteria are (i) intolerance toward other opinions, (ii) dogmatism, (iii) anti-pluralism, (iv) a clear-cut concept of the enemy, (v) self-perception as elite, and (vi) accepting and adopting violent means in order to reach ones goals (Backes & Jesse, 1996; Jaschke, 2006, George & Wilcox, 1992, Horgan, 2005). The last aspect—the question of violence—is crucial to distinguish between “extremism” and “terrorism.” Although often used synonymously and even though “terrorism” became widely used during the last decade to depict a diverse range of political positions, in scientific terms “terrorism” is simply an extreme form of extremism: whereas for extremists violence is a possibility, for terrorists violence is necessary for reaching their goals.

Many researchers suggest that extremists of different kinds have more in common than they would possibly admit (Backes & Jesse, 1996; George & Wilcox, 1992). Consequently, the criteria mentioned above are supposed to apply to different forms of extremism, such as rightwing, leftwing, and religious extremism—or as Laird Wilcox (1992, p. 54) puts it: “Extremism is more an issue of style than of content.”

I will discuss here the question of whether this proposition or the criteria themselves are correct or not. In my opinion, the more important point is the hereby created dichotomy between an extremist, intolerant and potentially violent side on the one hand and a democratic, moderate, pluralistic, and peaceful side on the other hand. In other words, extremism is constructed as an abnormal exception in relation to pluralism and democracy. Accordingly, for Western societies, extremism seems to be a phenomenon of the margins; it is constructed as coming from below and not from above (Horgan, 2005).

This view on extremism applies to the individual level (see next subsection) as well as to the governmental sphere. Subsequently, the political practices of Western governments are by no means defined as “extremist,” even though its rhetoric and activities might reveal a clear concept of the enemy, intolerance toward other opinions, and even the adoption of violence. Given the self-concept of being democratic, the label “extremist” for such politics would be a contradiction in terms. The same is valid on an international level: so called authoritarian states (usually non-western) are often labeled “extremist” by Western governments or international organizations that are dominated by Western states. Such governments or countries are often incriminated and excluded from international procedures. These countries usually have a rather weak position in
relation to the Western world. Obviously, the term “extremist” only applies to political enemies who don’t hold power.

Thus, it becomes clear that “extremism” is a label of condemnation which is deeply involved in power relations. It helps to devalue opinions, acts, people and sometimes whole states or governments as evil, immoral and illegitimate (George & Wilcox, 1992; Horgan, 2005). The involvement of “extremism” into power relations is also revealed by the fact that the consequences of being labeled “extremist” vary profoundly if, for instance, the president of the United States of America calls the North-Korean leader an “extremist” or the other way around; or if a small right wing group calls the German homeland security “extremist” or vice versa. This top down character of the label “extremism” shows the necessity of including the question of power within the analysis.

Research on extremism and its shortcomings

During the last decade the amount of literature published on extremism and specifically terrorism has become immense. However, as John Horgan (2005, p. xii) puts it: “It still surprises us that just because there is more information on terrorism than ever before it does not necessarily follow that we understand it any better.” One can easily replace “terrorism” with “extremism” at this point. But how do scientific researchers and specifically psychologists actually investigate “extremism”? Despite the fact that “extremism” has changed profoundly during the last decade the main means for approaching the question of extremism are still the same: the analyses of political extremist parties, organizations and groups on the one hand, and biographical reconstructions to understand why certain people have become extremists on the other hand. The latter question was and is actually one of the most popular subjects when “extremism” is concerned.

Biographical reconstructions seem to be a genuine psychological enterprise, but the role of psychology in such research is, compared to the other social sciences (e.g. sociology or politics), quite underdeveloped. Horgan (2005) argues that the reason for this may be because the focus of psychology is on the individual, not on political processes or social movements. While this argument in the critique of the mainstream of psychology is not that new, it furthermore implies that non-psychological biographical research is to some extent different. But most studies (whether sociological or educational) I have come across during my current research on rightwing extremism do not explore political and social processes, let alone discourses but focus on socialization and developmental conditions of individuals, e.g., the situation of and the relations within the family, the educational career and the significance of peer relations (Willems, 1992; Frindt & Neumann, 2002). To this some psychological studies add insights from clinical psychology, psychiatry, or psychoanalysis (Post, 2007; Wahl, 2001). Subjects of all these studies have been people who already hold extremists views and in many cases have been sentenced because of politically motivated crimes. (This is not that surprising: the juridical system provides one of the very few opportunities to approach extremists for research.)

As a result of such research we get a kind of prototyped extremist which in the case of right wing extremists is characterized as follows: a male teenager or young adult with a broken and often violent family background; a lack of education and therefore a lack of professional perspectives; a criminal record; and psychological abnormalities like alcohol abuse, anxiety, and the incapability of solving conflicts without violence. So,
although biographical studies doubtlessly provide interesting insights on a personal level, what do they really tell us about extremism or about the process of becoming an extremist? Even though a few extremists share all these characteristics, to the majority of them only some of the aspects apply—but the same is true for many people who have never felt attracted to extremist political ideas—and some extremists do not exhibit a single one of the listed traits. Accordingly, my analysis of interviews with young adults in Germany who committed rightwing motivated crimes revealed rather diverse biographical experiences: whereas one group actually experienced broken home situations, violence and a drop out of school, many others reported stable, nonviolent and trustful family relations, educational success and professional opportunities. And, beyond the heavy drinking of alcohol which almost all interviewees admitted, only one person had a psychiatric record.

It becomes clear at this point that an individual focus falls short of explaining or preventing a phenomenon like rightwing extremism. Moreover, the individual gaze in the research supports the tendency of the discourse to construct rightwing extremism and its protagonists as a problem of the periphery, unrelated to the center. It blocks out the social world and reduces rightwing extremism to individual problems, weaknesses and psychopathology, thereby excluding people who are defined as rightwing extremists from the world of the majority. And even if social aspects such as discrimination, injustice and poverty are included into the research, they are typically individualized: an individual fear of losing one’s economic status; an individual experience of being excluded because of one’s origin; or an individual incapability of problem solving is made responsible for the development of extremist ideas.

Although such focus on the marginal individual might be quite comfortable for the societal center with its democratic self-perception, critical psychological research obviously cannot just stop here, but has to ask for further evidence beyond the individual level.

**Power, discourse, and extremism**

What is needed is an understanding of the responsibilities of the “center”, the meaning of social discourses and power relation, to provide insights into the functioning of extremism and its protagonists. Such understanding can rely on a few approaches that provide a broader perspective on extremism, moving beyond a focus on the individual to take power relations and the role of social discourses into account.

Sometimes these approaches do not have to be explicitly removed from the mainstream. Even rather conventional social psychological research on intergroup relations and conflicts shows, for instance, that power is crucial in judging one’s own political position and the views of opposing groups: those in power judge people with opposing opinions (and who are not in power) as far more extreme than they in fact are, which could easily lead to marginalizing conflicting views by the label “extremism” (Keltner & Robinson, 1996).

An explicitly critical example is the discourse analytic research in the field of rightwing extremism and racist discourses in mainstream society by Siegfried Jäger (e.g., 2009) and his colleagues. These studies reveal that racist and extreme rightwing discourses (e.g., “migrants are naturally backwards and idle”) are part of the mainstream consensus and are frequently relied on by politicians and the media. Subsequently, as many biographical studies including my own research show, the persuasion to act in the
name of the silent majority (e.g. the statement of one interviewee: “Everybody around here thinks like that.”) and the selective and exaggerated use of mainstream discourses on nation, race, migration, and economics (e.g. the claim “Criminal foreigners out!” during demonstrations or election campaigns) are crucial for the self-conception of rightwing extremists.

Similarly focused on society, power and discourses is Birgit Rommelspacher (2006) who, as a result of her work with former rightwing extremists, concludes that the role of the Western dominant culture is crucial for an understanding of rightwing extremism. To her, this dominant culture prefers certain social groups such as whites, Christians, males and, on the level of the nation state, the natives of a country. It thereby devaluates non-whites, non-Christians, females and immigrants. This inequality is and cannot be an explicit strategy of the dominant culture, because the well-being of the privileged groups depends on the existence of those others. This ambivalence leads to a rather double-edged relationship between the dominant culture and rightwing extremism: On the one hand the dominant culture provides exactly the basis rightwing arguments rely on. On the other hand, with the self-conception of being democratic and open minded, rightwing extremism has to be strictly rejected by the dominant culture. In projecting rightwing extremism onto “problematic” individuals, the dominant culture can ignore and neglect its own extremism.

The insight that there is no such thing as a clear distinction between an extremist periphery and a democratic center leads the critical psychologist to look for crucial connections between individual biographies and their social and political environments. During the time of the socialization of my interviewees for instance (the 1990s), two sections of social discourses seemed to have been significant for their turning towards rightwing ideas: On the one hand, especially in East-Germany where all of the interviewees grew up, many people at the time felt deeply disappointed by the results of the profound social changes and the new societal system and its institutions. In parts of East-German media and politics this discontent created a discourse of disadvantage compared to Germans in the West. On the other hand, during the 1990s a rather open xenophobic discourse prevailed in the German media and in politics when topics like migration and especially asylum seekers where concerned (e.g. “The boat is full!” or “Most foreigners are free-loaders.”). Accordingly, several of the interviewees relied on such slogans and felt bound to act when for instance migrants or asylum seekers were placed in their hometowns. Furthermore, numerous interviewees remembered not only a kind of tolerance of their racist and chauvinist ideas, their rightwing outfit, and their violent behavior by their social surroundings, but even outspoken right wing and xenophobic opinions within in their families. And almost every participant experienced a striking blindness toward rightwing outfits and arguments by school officials and teachers (Kleeberg-Niepage, 2012).

Clearly, such focus in the analysis of extremism is not aimed at constructing the individual as a mere victim of his or her living conditions, but at raising an understanding of the role of mainstream society in the permanent reproduction of rightwing ideas. Such an understanding is crucial for the question of prevention of political opinions which more than often result in racist violence against “others.” As a right wing persuasion is not a kind of illness, but has been acquired in a process of permanent debate with one’s social and societal environment, a sustainable account of prevention cannot simply stick to educational projects for supposedly uneducated
individuals from the margins. It primarily has to tackle the relevant discourses within mainstream society itself.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, is the discourse on extremism an extremist discourse? Obviously, the discourse on extremism is not extremist in the sense of being marginal: it is widely agreed upon in politics, science, and the media. But it is extremist in the sense of (i) excluding people with political ideas beyond the mainstream of society, (ii) describing extremism as an abnormal kind of human nature, (iii) using a narrow, individualized perspective on the questions of how and why people become extremists and (iv) in the sense of ignoring power relations and the role of social discourses.

Indeed, it is of course important to ask for peoples’ biographies, to ask for crucial points and turns on their way into extremism. But since development and political socialization are reciprocal processes we cannot do this without including the social world. So what does it mean for scientists, especially psychologists to research “extremism” under new conditions? Firstly, it clearly means moving beyond individualistic accounts and (i) to acknowledge that extremism is a discourse and not a natural or individual phenomenon, (ii) to include power relations and the role of social discourses into the research and (iii) to rely on an interdisciplinary focus. Secondly, this should result in abandoning the individualized view on extremism and including the so-called mainstream, the center of society, into the analysis.

Finally, it might be considered that people who deal with issues many people would like to avoid (e.g., economic inequalities or conflicts between social and religious groups within societies) are often called “extremists” as well. But by addressing such unpleasant topics they do fulfill a certain watchdog position (George & Wilcox, 1992) and point a finger at the unresolved tensions of mainstream society. A telling historical instance is the first use of the term “extremist” in early 19th century Germany, when it referred to a small group of politically active people who supported the ideas of the French revolution. Eventually, the ideas of those early “extremists” became the heart of the democratic self-conception and the mainstream of political ideas; in short: the periphery became the center.

REFERENCES


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: The research project “Development of local strategies against extremism” was conducted by the Institute of Applied Research on Children, Youth and the Family at the University of Potsdam/Germany. My participation in the ISTP conference 2011 was funded by a DAAD-grant.
Chapter 24

Feminism in Israel:
A slow but noticeable change in women’s psychology

Dahlia Moore

College of Management-Academic Studies, Israel

SUMMARY

This paper focuses on three questions: (1) Why didn’t Israeli women fight for equality until the mid-1980s? (2) What made the change possible? And (3) Where are Israelis now and where are they headed? It also deals with different feminist ideologies which influenced Israeli society in general and psychology of women in particular. The analysis shows that unlike their mothers, who had to fight to separate feminist issues from other pressing social issues, young women in the third millennium grew up in a society that recognizes and in most cases legitimizes feminist social action, and are more inclined to take the legitimacy of feminism for granted. Hence, women now have many legitimate options, and they can turn from one to the other according to their needs. Moreover, men, too, (especially young men) now have an interest in more egalitarian division of family and work roles.

INTRODUCTION

The paper is based on three suppositions: (1) Increasing gender equality is a desirable goal for individuals and society; (2) Gender equality does not imply “sameness.” Men and women may have different ways of doing things, but the differences may lead to similar results (for example, men and women may have different management styles, but equal economic results); (3) To increase gender equality, some major social changes need to be made, and those who benefit from the existing unequal situations are bound to resist such changes.

The struggle for equality is far from over in Israel, which is similar to trends in many societies, and Israeli society often fails to recognize and value women’s contributions in diverse life domains. Moreover, Israeli feminism developed slower than it did in most advanced Western societies. Though strongly influenced by global changes, it had to work around specific local psychological and cultural limiting forces. These limiting forces are presented to answer the first question this paper deals with. The paper then discusses the forces that enabled Israeli women to fight for their rights and attain significant social changes. The third part of the paper, dealing with the current situation in Israel shows how far women have come. The summation deals with future trends that seem to be forming in Israel, and are similar to trends in many other societies.

WHY WOMEN COULD NOT FIGHT FOR EQUALITY

The Zionist socialist movement and the Kibbutz (with its egalitarian ideology) asserted that they could create social equality. However, feminist researchers have shown that these ideologies failed to create gender equality or to change the psychology of women
and the traditional perception of roles in the kibbutz in pre-state Israel (e.g., Bernstein, 1992).

A close scrutiny of Kibbutz history reveals male-dominated institutions that involved subordination of women’s positions. Feminist ideas were perceived by some as of secondary importance to attaining equality and by others as opposing—even in conflict with—the Zionist Kibbutz values. For example, finding jobs for new immigrants so that every family would have at least one breadwinner was presented as highly important. As most of the immigrants arrived from highly traditional societies (e.g., Libya, Morocco, and Yemen), finding jobs for men was seen as far more important than for women. Moreover, for many years, the equality principle was taken to mean that women should work like men, even in physically demanding manual jobs. Any request to adjust quotas to women’s different physical abilities met with derogation. On the other hand, men left all “feminine” jobs (e.g., kitchen duties, taking care of children) to women (Bernstein, 1992).

The Zionist-socialist ideology supported the Kibbutz myth and did not see the status of women as a separate issue from the status of all other social categories. Moreover, lacking legitimacy to openly oppose socialist hegemony, women attempted to advance their issues through hegemonic institutions. Attempts to present an alternative ideology were considered undermining the process of nation building and defending the new state against its enemies (Izraeli, 1981).

The second force that hindered the spreading of feminist ideas was—and still is—religion. Israel is one of the countries in which state and religion are not separated, and “Jewish” refers to both a person’s nationality and his or her religion. For all Israelis, religion is defined at birth, according to a mother’s religion.

State and religion are not separated in Israel and society is constantly torn between two clashing ideological value systems: civic, universalistic, and secular values on the one hand, and the nationalistic, particularistic, and religious values on the other hand (Eisenstadt, 1985). Furthermore, two separate and completely independent judicial systems were created in Israel: the secular, democratic system deals with all but family-laws which are the domain of religious, autocratic courts of law.

The premises upon which the two judicial systems are based are inherently contradictory. According to secular law all persons are equal; religious law accepts inequality as a basic concept, and inferiority of women is a basic premise: men divorce women, but not vice versa; a woman who has a sexual relationship with another man while married may be divorced by her husband without her consent, without alimony or her share of the mutual property. She may even lose custody over her children. No such laws apply to men.

Until recently, through tacit agreement, religious law was always accorded supremacy, so that whenever secular and religious laws clashed—religious law was upheld. Social protest regarding the injustice has been negligible until egalitarian ideologies in Western societies were more strongly assimilated in Israel in the 1990s.

**WHAT MADE CHANGE POSSIBLE?**

The liberal ideals that began spreading in Western societies in the early 1960s and affected such forces as equal rights and civil liberties movements, reached Israel in the mid-1970s. Concurrently, the socialist ideology lost its hegemonic status in the 1977
elections, enabling the rise to power of the capitalist right-wing coalition. It also enabled feminist activism that increased in the 1980s (Herzog, 1999). The psychology of women also changed and women began to legitimize gender differences and women’s “different voice” (Gilligan, 1982). These changes contributed to changes in the gendered division of labor and had a significant liberating influence on women’s values and attitudes, and increasing their willingness to participate in social action (Moore, 1995).

Women’s demands for equality became clearer and more determined when women's organizations embraced more radical feminist ideologies (Safran, 2006). Being mostly grass roots organizations, they spread feminist ideas to almost all national, ethnic, economic, religious and education groups and categories (Shadmi, 2007).

The unity of feminist groups declined in the 1990s, with the appearance of specific women’s groups—Mizrahi, Religious, Palestinian and Lesbian—that demanded recognition for their uniqueness and needs. Their lack of equal representation in larger organizations, and their rejection of what they defined “oppression by the dominant categories of women” (mainly Western heterosexual Jewish women), fragmented and diversified Israeli feminism (Lind & Farmelo, 1996).

Since the early 1990s, the rate of psychological, social, cultural and ideological changes in Israel has increased significantly. The critique against previous feminist notions and the desire to address issues that were insufficiently dealt with by earlier feminist movements led to the creation of new feminist trends. Most of these trends challenged the binary definitions of femininity—masculinity, which often assumed a universal female identity, based on experiences of upper middle class white women, which ignore the different experiences of races, classes, or sexual preferences (Code, 2000).

According to these trends, liberal feminism made no attempt to account for differential treatment of women based on ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Since the 1990s, several activist feminist organizations were created in Israel. One of the main organizations, “Ahoti” (my sister), created in 1991 by Mizrahi feminists, is a movement which acts to strengthen solidarity among women of low socioeconomic status to advance economic, social, and cultural justice (Dahan-Kalev, 2006). Other feminist groups, movements, centers, and forums include Palestinian, religious, and Lesbian organizations. The fragmentation of women’s identification enables women from diverse backgrounds to find a group or organization to belong to, but it also prevents a unification to enhance general causes that are common to all women.

Feminists today have diverse causes that most women do not join because they do not feel part of the specific group fighting for that cause. The lack of a cohesive goal that typifies feminism today also opens the possibility of attaining many, diverse and simultaneous goals, not a single, major goal. Each group of women fights for an issue which is highly relevant to the specific group.

Young women in the third millennium grew up in a society that recognizes—and in most cases legitimizes—feminist social action, and are more inclined to take the legitimacy of feminism for granted. Although they do not openly criticize young mothers for the option of intensive motherhood, older feminists frown upon these choices because they see them as going back to conventional economic dependence of women on their partners, and the reaffirming of traditional division of labor.
WHERE ARE WE NOW AND WHERE ARE WE HEADED?

Trends for men

Changing masculinity. Masculinity is usually defined not only as different from femininity but also as superior to it (Levant & Kopecky, 1995). This pattern is becoming less prevalent, acceptable, or even self-serving for men. The most important shift in masculinity is that avoidance of all that is feminine has lessened. It is not surprising, therefore, that some men begin to include alternative characteristics in their self-presentations. Espousing feminine traits among men is not acceptable in all segments of society, and even when it is normative—feminine traits are transformed by men to assume a masculine interpretation (Moore, 2009). Though a totally “feminine” behavior is still prevented in young boys, totally “masculine” behaviors (like aggressive domineering behaviors) are also not tolerated (Anderson, 2005).

Such changes in men can already be seen in the representation of the metrosexual. The representation is rather new, not sufficiently studied or well-defined. The typical metrosexual is a young man with money to spend, living in or within easy reach of a metropolis—because that’s where all the best shops, clubs, gyms and hairdressers are. He might be officially gay, straight or bisexual, but this is utterly immaterial because he has clearly taken himself as his own love object and pleasure as his sexual preference. But the presentation of metrosexuals as narcissistic, pleasure-seeking individuals addresses only part of what defines them: they are also interested in improving their relationships with others (especially women), enhancing their careers without feeling chained by conventions, and increasing their general wellbeing by fulfilling diverse aspects of their potential. Metrosexuality may be considered a means of establishing greater equality between the sexes (Coad, 2008).

“Domestic men.” No longer considered “effeminate,” men who acknowledge their emotional side, and do not consider free expression of sentiments threatening, are also able to relate better to their children. “New fatherhood” (Parke, 1996) is becoming a well-known term. It refers to involved, caring fathering, leading to stronger bonds between men and their children. The importance attributed to the issue in the last decade is apparent in the many studies published in books, journals, conferences and websites.

The intensive parenting norm that became apparent at the beginning of the 20th century, affected fathers as well as mothers, and researchers have increasingly asserted that fathers need to spend more time parenting. Evidence that men are aware of this norm is evident in the increase in the time that fathers spend with their children (e.g., Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002).

The growing desire of some women to develop their own careers may strengthen this tendency in men: because work opportunities have grown for women, and self-fulfillment through work is legitimate for them, women who choose this path will encourage their partners to work fewer hours, to share both the financial and the domestic burden more equally, and support them when they change their preferences (Dew, 2009).

Trends for women

Society is more accepting of diverse lifestyles, legitimizing varied attitudes associated with these lifestyles. If, in the past, women had to compromise, usually giving up their...
careers once they had children, their options today are more varied. In addition to the familiar and prevalent option of combining family and work, there are new—socially legitimate—alternatives available to women today. These choices may be grouped into four major categories: 1. Returning home; 2. Intensive careering; 3. Combining family and Career; and 4. Self-centered individual development.

Returning home. There were always women who did not work, worked part-time, or chose jobs that allowed them to focus on their domestic and family roles. There were also women who could not join the workforce because they had no social arrangements to care for their children while they worked.

An ideological change can be seen accompanying the return home in recent years, especially among young career women: armed with third-wave feminist ideologies, some successful high-achievers choose to return home once they become mothers. Motherhood has become part of feminist notions of fulfilling what “womanhood” means. Several social processes facilitate the transition from full-time careers to full-time motherhood: maternity-leave policies, the pressure to breastfeed, “Child in the Center” ideology, motherhood as Identity (Arendell, 2000).

Intensive careering. Though this choice is more popular among unmarried women, a growing number of women who are mothers choose this option in the 21st century. The ideological change that supports this trend is based on escalating legal demands for equality and the expanding cultural insistence on maintaining appropriate (“politically correct”) representation of gender, race, age, disability and so forth. Although this trend is not as strong as the one that has accompanied the tendency of some women to become full-time moms, there is a radicalization of previous attitudes. Women who choose this alternative believe that combining family and work is enriching rather than a source of conflict, something they desire and feel is rightfully within their options. The change in values, beliefs and norms makes these aspirations acceptable socially, though not all segments of society equally support them. Throughout Western society, career-oriented women often have to give up on family life and remain single, or they postpone marriage and having children until they have attained higher education and professional status (Blossfeld & Huinink, 1991).

Combining family and career. Although the percentage of mothers in the labor force increased from 45% in 1965 to an astonishing 78% in 2000, most mothers still work part-time, and even when they work full-time, they work fewer hours than men (mothers spend 37 hours per week in paid labor; fathers work 44 hours). These studies also show that mothers who work fulltime and have young children do significantly more housework and childcare than fathers (mothers spend 15 hours on child care and 21 hours on housework per week; fathers who are married to women who work full-time spend only 9 hours on child care and 15 hours on housework per week). This may explain why only 15% of married mothers of small children work full-time. The data may be hiding even larger differences. Mothers, who maintain full-time high status careers when their children are young, tend to keep in touch with their family more and are more accessible than men (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006). Hence, it seems that if the trend of later marriage, fewer children per woman, higher career aspirations is maintained, more women will choose the option to emphasize work rather than family, and serve as role models.

Self-centered individual development. One of the most obvious developments among young women today is that there is no “mainstream.” “Be what you want,” “choose your style,” and “you can become anything you wish” are some of the claims often
heard in the media aimed at teenaged girls. They are encouraged to do their own thing, be themselves (Griffin, 2004). Their movies and cultural icons present them with no specific and unified image of the right way to be. Moreover, the individualized messages are not necessarily feminist. Young women today often lack feminist awareness but they act in ways that second-wave feminists would define as feminist; other women may consider themselves feminist, but they act in ways that are undifferentiated from traditional women (e.g., the behaviors of “traditional housewives” who accept the conventional division of roles are not distinguishable from those of “full-time moms” whose actions are based on feminist ideologies).

Young woman today decide for themselves whether they consider themselves feminist or not, how to be feminists, and what feminism means in their lives, claims McRobbie (2008), developing a new type of feminism which she calls “popular feminism.” They refer to previous feminist ideologies as anachronistic, believing that previous generations have already attained equality and freedom of choice. Instead, they develop their own rough language. They often choose to behave like boys of their age, to the dismay of older feminists.

In summation, both men and women are changing so that many aspects of their lives are changing: their traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, preferences, and behaviors. Consequently, the binary division of “male” and “female” identities seems to be less applicable today than it used to be. Diverse and more complex identities become more noticeable. This may lead to a wider change in the relations between genders. No longer rigidly defined, the roles men and women play, and their ways of interaction may also change to accommodate the new flexibility.

The impact of these trends on family life and organizational practices. The many changes that men and women have been through had a major impact on both family and work spheres. Some changes in these spheres can be clearly seen today, others are just beginning, are more apparent among trend-setters (e.g., media icons, political figures, social leaders), and are generally legitimized by the mass media. Therefore, we should expect the trend to strengthen and become more widespread, reaching broader populations in the near future.

Changing families

Statistics throughout the Western world show a decline in the proportion of “traditional” families, so that married heterosexuals (mother and father) and their biological children are but a variation on what a family is. Single parenthood, cohabitation (with or without children), divorced parents having joint custody, gay/lesbian families, and remarried individuals raising children from previous marriages are but a few of the better known alternative patterns that are becoming viable and legally recognized family options in many societies (Lixia, Weston, & de Vaus, 2009).

In Western society, but also in many third-world countries where necessity (rather than liberal, feminist or related ideologies) is the force that leads to change, a wide spectrum of allocations of domestic and work burdens is now legitimized: from the traditional division to the reversal of roles, with all variations in between. It seems that common to most types of new families is a more egalitarian division of labor (when there is more than one adult in the household), with much more reliance on negotiations as the means to decide who does what and when (Joyner, 2009).
Cohabiting couples, young individuals, and gay and lesbian couples report a stronger desire for equality in family and work responsibilities, with a greater flexibility to shape their lives than their parents had. Men seem less afraid of social stigma if they assume greater responsibility for the domestic sphere than their partners, and they do not tend to consider having a partner who earns more a threat to their masculinity as previous generations tended to feel. Likewise, women are not considered “bad partners” if they do less at home but shoulder more of the financial burden.

It is not surprising, therefore, that family structure is changing, and so are family roles. With the growing desire of many women to share domestic responsibility (and their need to do so because of career pressures), and men’s willingness to share more equally, many more women have become the major breadwinners for their families. According to Goldstein (2000), the proportion of couples in which the woman is chief breadwinner has been increasing so markedly that nearly one in three working wives nationwide now is paid more than her husband, compared with fewer than one in five in 1980.

It seems logical to conclude, therefore, that families will continue to change: fewer people actually marry (more opt for cohabitation), and therefore divorce rates will continue to decline, the age of parents will continue to grow, and there will be fewer children per family. In addition, as men become more in tune with their emotions, and women’s earning potential increases, they will more happily change roles, despite the age-old accord between husbands and wives.

**Changing organizations**

Work organizations, as with many social institutions, have already begun to accept these changes. In many work settings, the need to accommodate working parents led to creating solutions that are implemented with growing ease and tolerance. Hence, flexible working hours, job-sharing practices, work-from-home arrangements hinder workers’ careers less than in past decades. Technological changes (like video conferences and internet access), and the proliferation of communication media that facilitate contacting home (while at work) or work (while at home) further enhance these trends. Furthermore, changes in the structures of organizations create new flexibilities that work better for families. Virtual organizations, for example, tend to demand less long-term commitment, with less structured advancement opportunities, which is better suited to young individuals—especially women—who are not yet sure of their work-related preferences.

Another trend becomes more noticeable in recent years: addressing emotions in organizations. When research on emotions began in the 1990s, it focused mainly on how affect is inseparable from work processes: “As emotional arenas, organizations bond and divide their members. Workday frustrations and passions—boredom, envy, fear, love, anger, guilt, infatuation, embarrassment, nostalgia, anxiety—are deeply woven to the roles are enacted and learned, power is exercised, trust is held, commitment formed and decisions made” (Fineman, 2006, p. 1).

Dealing with emotions and attempting to harness their energy to increase organizational effectiveness is becoming more widespread. As emotions are associated more strongly with women than with men, accepting the importance of emotions to organizational processes and governance enhances the understanding of women’s
contributions and increases the roles women can play in organizations (Lewis & Simpson, 2007).

**Generational changes: The added complexity of Generation Y**

The changes we see in both men and women are made more complex by cultural/generational changes that are apparent today. The generation born between the late 1980s and 2000—Generation Y (also referred to as millennials or nets)—is different from what we have come to know in society, in the corporate world, and in families. Young adults of this generation see life as a search for fulfillment of their needs rather than as a series of duties and obligations, of expectations, or of full-time employment. Agility and resilience typify them more than steadfastness and long-term loyalty. They are technologically savvy, enthusiastic about social responsibility, and prefer to work collaboratively (Ferri-Reed, 2010).

One of the possible consequences of these tendencies is lower stability in both their family and work life. Social planning as well as organizational forecasts may suffer because of these unpredictable shifts and new assumptions concerning the relevance of work and constancy in individuals’ lives must be made. For example, the notions concerning the suitable worker must change as should the suppositions concerning how to create and maintain motivation, both of which rely on the assumption that a worker wants to keep on working in the organization, and that the existing rewards (mainly money, benefits, status and/or power) appeal to these workers. But these factors seem less relevant to Generation Y workers (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008).

Because Generation Y view their lives as including family and careers, as well as leisure, the existence of flexibility in work options that allows for continued employment while raising a family will be highly valued, especially by women (Bosco & Bianco, 2005). The ability to offer family leave, telecommuting, job sharing, or other flexible work arrangements will be desirable selling points for these potential employees because those options allow workers to balance their careers and homes. Employers who provide multiple options to these employees who are concerned with career and family balance will clearly have the advantage in attracting and retaining such workers.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Several trends may be found, and are expected to become more noticeable. Both men and women have several legitimate choices of life styles: (1) they can choose to work in full- or part-time jobs, or they can choose not to work at all; (2) they can choose to marry or stay single; they can decide to postpone getting married; they can decide to have children or not; (3) they can decide to postpone having children until their careers are well established, or choose to turn to part-time employment or quit their jobs until their children reach school age; (4) they can decide to postpone both marriage and work, and turn to higher education and/or enjoy the freedom available to younger individuals, especially those whose families are well-off and are willing to support them. Given the growing flexibility in many work places, choosing the right alternative for oneself is more confusing for young adults.

Lifestyle preferences of young adults today are varied: (a) full-time work, no marriage; (b) full-time work, marriage, no children; (c) full-time work, marriage,
children, and continue to work with only minor interruption for childbirth; (d) full-time work, marriage, children, stop working but return to full-time job before the youngest is in school; (e) full-time work, marriage, children, stop working but return to part-time job before the youngest is in school; (f) full-time work, marriage, children, stop working at least until the youngest is in school, then pursue full-time work; (g) full-time work, marriage, children, stop working until the youngest is in school, then pursue part-time work; and (h) full-time work, marriage, children, stop working. If we apply these optional life styles to both men and women, the number of possible combinations is immense.

However, in Israel, these trends are only relevant among the young secular Jewish individuals. The opposing trends—of conservative traditionalism—are strengthening in Israel as well as in other societies.

REFERENCES


Chapter 25

The ethics of psychology in the age of the globalized therapeutic culture

Ole Jacob Madsen
University of Bergen, Norway

SUMMARY

Psychology in the late 20th and early 21st centuries is often depicted as a globalized therapeutic culture, existent in evermore niches of late Western society. How can this “everywhereanness of psychology” be dealt with by the discipline of psychology in a responsible manner? The article maintains that whereas in previous decades the debate has been whether psychologists should refrain from any extra-laboratory activities, or should actively take the role of promoters of human welfare in society, this distinction is no longer meaningful, as psychology already finds itself in the center of Western culture. I highlight the new challenge for psychology under new conditions by the recent rise of cosmetic surgery in Norway, which is embedded in the therapeutic culture, and thus avoids criticism by advocating that surgical interventions is mainly directed at gaining self-esteem. I conclude that the present challenge might be considered the final argument for societal ethics rather than traditional professional ethics, in order to sufficiently deal with the present psychologized state of affairs.

INTRODUCTION

Hermann Ebbinghaus (1908) famously remarked that psychology has a long past but short history. The division between the broader cultural continuities and the discipline of psychology has also been captured in the separation between large-P psychology and small-p psychology. One of the first historians of psychology, Edwin G. Boring, later dubbed “the discipline builder” (cf. Cerullo, 1988), introduced this helpful distinction in his influential textbook History of Experimental Psychology (1929). Big-P psychology denotes the formal, institutionalized discipline of Psychology, including the academic departments, journals, organizations and other trappings of professionalization (Pickren & Rutherford, 2010). Small-p psychology denotes the psychological subject matter itself and contains the everyday psychology that has always existed as people make sense of their lives. Yet, as Wade Pickren and Andrea Rutherford (2010) underscores in a recent social history of psychology, this relatively straightforward distinction quickly becomes complicated when we add that Psychology has been actively involved in creating its own subject matter, altered it and ultimately created constructs that would not (most likely) have existed without it. Kurt Danziger (1997) has likewise made the astute observation that Ebbinghaus’ division differs in the sense that the objects studied by psychology were deemed natural objects, whereas “the distinction between capital-p and small-p psychology implies that the phenomena studied are not natural at all, but historically constituted objects” (p. 139). The discipline of psychology is only possible when people at a certain time in history come to develop a psychological understanding of themselves and their everyday conduct. Furthermore, this implies that the future of
the discipline of psychology presupposes that people continue to contain psychological constructs in their outlook on self and society. The liquid, but intimate reliance between small-p and large-P psychology presents the psychology profession with some interesting and troubling questions regarding its social responsibility for the broader cultural representations of psychology. In fact, the relationship between ethical professional responsibility and the wider implications of psychology have its own history which I now briefly consider.

In September 1969, George A. Miller, APA’s 77th President, in the annual presidential speech held in Washington D.C. stayed off the anticipated topic—his own research the previous year. Miller (1956) is among the most cited psychologists in the whole history of psychology for his work on working memory. Yet, instead Miller (1969) decided to address the wider implications of psychology for society. There were several historically significant incidents at the time which provoked a testing assessment of the proper relationship between science and society; e.g., in March 1967 a student, Bob Feldman, discovered documents in the International Law Library detailing Columbia University's institutional affiliation with the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA), a weapons research think-tank connected with the U.S. Department of Defense. This association had never before been publicly announced, and provoked a lengthy student protest and anti-war campaign, in light of the enduring Vietnam War. Miller’s (1969) appeal to his colleagues was that psychology up until then, despite its remarkable success, had not successfully realized its full potential in promoting human welfare—“the psychological revolution,” and worse, was unevenly distributed, and often in the hands of men of power who misused the psychology of control to gain profit for the few. Miller (1969) draws attention to how wealthy industrialists and bureaucratic leaders use behavioral principles like control to create a work- and organizational-life dominated by external control and threats, instead of self-direction and self-control so that people can use psychology principles (on) themselves to stimulate creativity and ingenuity. Hence, Miller (1969) therefore gives a historical call for the democratization of science, “giving psychology away,” yet, appear to face a silent majority of large-P psychologists whom preferred to continue their laboratory life indifferent to the societal processes that goes on outside. In a sense this is also the classic conflict in science (see Lubchenko, 1998), between the scientist who accepts the wider implications and consequences of his work, and the ones whom maintain that such considerations cannot be implemented in the research process, which out of necessity must be in ignorance of any practical application.

In the decades that followed, Miller’s “psychological revolution,” was more or less realized when psychology became widely available for the masses to practice on themselves. I will mainly draw on the concept of “self-esteem” in the following to highlight this development. From the perspective of “governmentality” self-esteem is a form of specialized knowledge of how to esteem, calculate, evaluate and discipline ourselves. Barbara Cruikshank (1996), for instance, maintains that “self-esteem” becomes available for the increasingly empowered citizen, so that they can act on themselves, so that the psychologists, police and doctors do not have to. The psychological revolution meant that psychology was reachable for more people through self-help manuals, popular psychology books, expert advice in magazines, TV-shows, therapeutic reality television, online personality tests, etc. The leading scholars on the therapeutic culture in the 90s, like Nikolas Rose (1996, 1999) and Eva Illouz (2007, 2008), despite dissimilar critical backgrounds, are in agreement over the notion
that psychology could not have expanded had it not helped a majority of people coping with their struggles and ambitions and making sense of their individual freedom and human suffering in their everyday life.

**DOING PSYCHOLOGY UNDER NEW CONDITIONS**

The “everywhereness of psychology” (Jarzombek, 2000) in the globalised culture in the late part of the 20th and early part of 21st century also means that psychology is now practiced by a range of experts and counsellors who are not authorized professional psychologists. This is perhaps the most obvious case of how large-P Psychology finds itself confronted with small-p psychology, when it is visibly practiced by another profession or various types of therapeutic expert. The President of the Norwegian Psychological Association Tor Levin Hofgaard (2011) recently wrote a thought-provoking article in which he considers the responsibility Norwegian psychologists holds for this tendency where psychology is practiced by non-psychologists. He maintains that part of the professional and ethical conduct is to raise and secure the quality of psychological activity; how psychological knowledge is applied by non-psychologists is therefore of importance for the discipline of psychology. Like his American predecessor Miller, Hofgaard argues that Norwegian psychologists must concern themselves with psychology outside Psychology, and take on an active role as educators of personnel, nurses, doctors, coaches and pedagogics, and whoever fills the role of practicing psychology. Thus, the ethical dilemma—to take on an active societal role or not—becomes the primary moral challenge for psychologists once again. However, as I will seek to demonstrate through the utility of self-esteem and cosmetic surgery within the therapeutic culture, we now find ourselves post the psychological revolution, yet the development may not automatically end in an enlightened heaven, which Miller perhaps latently hoped for. Miller’s conception of psychology as something neutral in society that does not automatically have positive effects is quite extraordinary when representing a labor union like APA; nonetheless his dream of a psychological revolution appears glanced in the Enlightenment belief of discovering universal laws and manipulating nature in order to maximize happiness for mankind (cf. Bacon, 2009). “The psychological revolution” has been a central part of, or even a necessary condition for the empowerment movement, yet the desire for individual health and well-being under neoliberalism appear to take unforeseen turns many psychologists would label unhealthy and obsessive.

**The case of cosmetic surgery**

Cosmetic surgery has during the 00s manifested itself in the Norwegian society. The number of private clinics and single person enterprises that offer cosmetic surgery has since 2003 increased with over 50% on a national basis. Eight years ago there were 49 businesses, today there are 76. The number of doctor specializing in plastic surgery increased from 73 candidates in 2003 to 120 in 2009. In 2003 the commerce of the nerve poison Botox used to straighten out facial wrinkles amounted to a total of 2.9 million NKR, while the numbed had improved to 8.2 million NKR in 2009. According to Statistics Norway latest quality of life survey 5% of the populations reported to have undergone cosmetic surgery paid for privately, 7% of the women and 3% of the men. The tendency of a normalization of cosmetic surgery in Norway is also evident in the
general public’s attitudes towards it. When the popular cosmetic surgery show *Extreme Makeover* (ABC) first was broadcasted in Norwegian television back in 2003 it caused moral outrage and much public debate, and people’s attitudes towards cosmetic surgery in general was often negative. A decade on, nobody raises an eyebrow to the multiple cosmetic surgery shows widely available (*The Swan* (FOX), *I Want A Famous Face* (MTV), *Nip/Tuck* (FX) etc.), commercials for clinics are frequent in newspapers and magazines and having an operation appear to have become largely normalized in more layers of the population than in previous years. Still, critical voices are not silenced. A favorite explanation and scapegoat for critics and concerned commentators, and even the business themselves, is the media. The common narrative is that the media is much more fixated on how you look than before, and the sight of perfect (and Photoshopped) bodies in multiple magazines and television shows, makes people more likely to have a makeover themselves. Particular findings among American College Students support this notion to some extent (Albright, 2007), and reality television in general is often commented for providing the script of how we live our lives in an even more medialised society (see Bratich, 2007). However, there is arguably still a deeper set of cultural and symbolic factors, which recent televised displays of cosmetic surgery only come to reflect and symptomize.

**The real you behind the layers of fat**

Representatives from the cosmetic industry frequently defend themselves from critical media scrutiny by pointing to the fact that we live in a society which has become extremely bodily fixated. Hence, they only provide the means to gain a release of tension from this common vanity. Yet, cosmetic surgeons appear less likely to talk about smoother face skin, bigger breasts or thicker lips, but tend to refer primarily to self-esteem issues. Numerous examples from Norwegian media about cosmetic surgery demonstrate this. Sissel Engen, the director of the Ellipse Clinique told a reporter: “We sell self-esteem and nothing else” (Overn, 2010, p. 8). While cosmetic surgeon Bjørn Tvedt gave the following account of what you could expect from an operation: “You will not necessarily become happier after having surgery, but it might help you gain self-esteem” (Forsund, 2010, p. 18) The tendency to address issues of mental well-being like self-esteem, rather than pure physical measures (“Get a slimmer body”) or aesthetical arguments (“We make you look beautiful”) might seem odd at first, but is not really that surprising if one considers a conceivable cultural explanation of cosmetic surgery recent success in Norway.

Cosmetic surgery has ever since its modern birth among the rich and famous Hollywood-stars going under the knife in the 1920s found an helpful legitimation alliance in psychology, most notably Alfred Adler’s (2009) inferiority complex which quickly was associated with having a to marked nose-bone or protruding ears. The early plastic surgery industry knew to capitalize on this. Norwegian psychologist Nina Østby Sæther (2006) noticed back in 2006 that attitudes towards cosmetic surgery in the population was shifting to a more welcoming climate, and less likely to embrace a moralizing critique, in particular if the reason for having an operation was to do with “something psychological.” The moral lesson is apparent: Being concerned for your appearances is shallow, but being concerned for your self-esteem because of how you perceive your body is not. Judith Franco (2008) has focused on how the body under neoliberalism undergoing cosmetic surgery on reality TV like *Extreme
Makeover becomes the most visible expression of a happy, successful self. This notion easily expires to ideas of corporeal authenticity, that somewhere underneath the layers of fat lies “the real you”. Complete makeovers involving cosmetic surgery are therefore in reality a therapeutic process about self-realization, finally redeeming the inner self.

Now, many psychologists remain critical of this tendency (cf. Orbach, 2009). One of the primary consumer groups of cosmetic surgery are teenage girls whom for instance seek a round of Restylane treatment to get richer lips. The 20-year old Kristina Anderson, one of Norway’s most popular bloggers with 28,000 unique readers every day, has taken this treatment and also written about her contentment with it on her blog. The questions from her young female readers are typically: “Did it hurt?”, “How much did it cost?” and “Do you think I should get a similar treatment?” (Overn, 2010, p. 8). The implications are potentially troubling. A frequent concern from a psychologist point of view would often be that the industry capitalizes on adolescent teenagers and women’s insecurities about being normal and desires to look as best as possible.

DISCUSSION

Concerned psychologists cautions against the cosmetic industry promise of improved self-image and self-esteem from going under the knife (Olsen, 2010). However, what if people who are subjected to cosmetic surgery gains a little bit of self-esteem from their enhanced bodies? For instance an investigation by Sarwer et al. (2008) of postoperative satisfaction and changes in psychosocial status following cosmetic surgery found that patients reported improvements in overall appearance and body image 24 months after surgery. The study also stated that patients reported improvements in self-esteem and a decrease in depressive symptoms following surgery, but neither of these changes where statistically significant. Of course, it is possible to question the long-term effect, as the reasons for having low self-esteem in the first place might only temporary be solved by a more positive body- or self-image. From the point of view of responsibility, the problem is that this critique is primarily methodological—psychologists and cosmetic surgeons are still in agreement that increased self-esteem is one of “the therapeutic culture’s” most valuable assets. This means that both groups become therapeutic agents and rivals in the therapeutic market, in offering the right remedy—the talking cure or the cutting cure—towards a state of mental well-being. In fact, Franco (2008) reports that anticosmetic surgery shows like Say No To The Knife (BBC) are now on the market where a psychologist encourages women to recognize their problems as psychological (low self-esteem and/or perfectionism). However, the problem of a proper platform to direct critique from stems from the fact that psychologists no longer find themselves in an exterior position as in the time of Miller’s presidency. On the contrary the ontological center the surgeons operate on so to speak is fundamentally psychological (Madsen & Brinkmann, 2011). Hence, the whole topography is altered since Miller’s toil to convince his reluctant peers that they should join him in the quest of making society a better place trough equally distributing psychology. The problem in the case of cosmetic surgery is the opposite: Everybody now practices psychology, different groups of experts and teenage girls have grown up on a diet of popular psychology, and practice it on themselves. “Giving psychology away” makes little sense as a responsible strategy here.
Professional ethics versus societal ethics

From the perspective of professional ethics (American Psychological Association, 2010) the argument can be made that psychologists should criticize cosmetic surgeons for misusing psychological concepts like self-esteem, and exploiting young females who already suffer from low spells of self-esteem and self-images of their bodies. Still, the urgency to do so is not likely overwhelming, if somebody outside professional psychology misuse psychology then that is unfortunate, but not really something psychological professionally can be held accountable for. Their primary responsibility is towards their clients. Prilleltensky (1990) maintains how psychologist often have institutionalized a narrow concept of ethics that results in a preoccupation with obligations towards the individual client at the expense of proactive moral behavior directed society at large. This bias is reflected in the American ethical principles for psychologists where there was little explicit mentioning of duties towards society (the 2010 amendment now enlists “social responsibility”). The Canadian principles devotes an entire section towards society, still Prilleltensky (1990) concludes that this obligation is considered the least important when in conflict with other principles. The Norwegian ethical principles for psychologists mentions responsibility towards society, yet only briefly, and as the last clause after responsibility towards the client and the organization is listed (The Norwegian Psychological Association, 1998).

From the standpoint of professional ethics the solution is perhaps to professionalize society, and possibly even the selection of consumers buying into cosmetic surgery. This has recently been suggested by psychological researchers in Norway as they found that psychological problems pre cosmetic surgery could inhibit the positive effects of cosmetic surgery like appearance satisfaction and improved self-esteem (Von Soest et al., 2009). Professional psychologists can make a difference by securing measuring the motifs and levels of self-esteem for potential customers, and also by lurking out any possible clientele with psychiatric diagnosis. In general the professional ethical stance is modeled on the belief in giving psychology away, which means being in authority and talking to the media about psychological concepts like self-esteem issues, or being responsible by writing a psycho-educative book about self-esteem. Yet, the trouble is that this continued well-meaning “feeding” from large-P psychology upholds and strengthens the therapeutic culture where cosmetic surgery currently thrives. The cosmetic surgeon effectively incorporates the therapeutic jargon.

From the perspective of societal ethics (Prilleltensky, 1990) where the distinction between large-P Psychology and small-p psychology is of less importance the whole cultural premise of cosmetic surgery and self-esteem, the therapeutic culture, is much more available to be taken into account. Of course, what it means is also to take a critical and perhaps painful look into how concepts from psychology comes to play an important function in the late capitalist consumer culture and economy of desire (cf. Wittel, 2004). Whenever cosmetic surgery has relied on psychological concepts from the inferiority complex to self-esteem, this is not just an expression of an industry that takes from psychology and is guilty of professional misconduct, but perhaps a more universal expression of the utility role psychology has come to play in Western society. Namely as a technology of the self (Rose, 1999), that sometimes lets people act on themselves and let others operate on themselves for futile causes. Psychology, from the professional branch to the outmost popularized versions of small-p psychology, now
provides men and women with a range of options, but unlike what Miller envisioned, they choices made are no guarantee to have a happy outcome.

Miller (1969) envisioned a psychology naturally inclined to promote human welfare five decades ago, and Prilleltensky concluded the following two decades ago: “Psychologists are not and cannot, be insulated from inculcation. Yet, it would seem as if we were operating under the premise that we can exclude ourselves from the ubiquitous nature of the hegemonic process” (1990, p. 311). So why is this responsibility in the present still necessary to argue for? A possible explanation stems perhaps from the fact that both professional ethics and societal ethics are moral positions embedded in a certain view of the relationship between ‘psychology’ and ‘society’. Professional ethics is recorded along the lines of the large-P psychology with distinct lines drawn between the therapy office and the psychological experiment in the laboratory. Social responsibility towards psychology outside psychology is easily the most fragile ethical horizon as it is the most peripheral to the professional’s everyday practice. Whereas societal ethics more naturally leads to a holistic view of psychology completed assimilated with the rest of the culture. The problem is that since this position deals with wider, long-term consequences of psychology, and not chiefly face-to-face dilemmas and conflicts, it needs to be argued for and defended to a greater extent than professional ethics that looks as if to come more naturally when working with vulnerable human beings on a daily basis (cf. Levinas, 1969). Perhaps cases like the peculiar alliance between self-esteem and cosmetic surgery can be of help as a vigorously reminder of how psychology in the widest sense is already out there—in the form of the therapeutic culture—which unnoticed offers human suffering new forms and shapes.

CONCLUSION

The ethical terrain in which psychology finds itself is fundamentally altered in the global therapeutic culture that Western man (and rapidly Eastern man) currently inhabits. For psychology to become less generous and more antidemocratic again seems both unethical and futile, yet the theme “taking psychology away” seems more appropriate than running empty on Miller’s former model of responsibility. A more fruitful angle of incidence is perhaps to start acknowledging that psychology cannot avoid reflect on its own enterprise as it is a fundamental contributor of self-technologies deeply embedded in the therapeutic culture. The everywhereness of psychology means that the old borders of large-P and small-p psychology are not as meaningful. Even if the psychology profession is still limited, its ethical horizon of responsibility is not. It looks as if there is quite some time before this moral lesson is widely accepted. What is often forgotten is that ‘ethics’ etymologically stems from the Greek “ethos” which means “habit” or “according to common practice.” And common practice for most psychologists still means clinical work in demarcated psychological spaces.

In this article I have discussed the ethics of psychology in the age of the globalised therapeutic culture by showcasing cosmetic surgery and issues of self-esteem in Norway. This particular instance demonstrates that the distinction between small-p psychology and large-P psychology is increasingly porous, and more importantly outdated if professional psychologists want to prove themselves as responsible for what goes on outside the therapist office, academic desk or experimental laboratory. Before the «psychological revolution», to prefer not to engage in promoting human welfare and
shut the door, was perhaps somewhat defensible as an ethical position, whereas of now psychology’s penetrative expansion is so extensive, that non-psychological spaces are virtually non-existent. A societal ethic of psychology must therefore be recognized as a necessity in the therapeutic culture, rather than a free choice for the overly socially engaged professional.

REFERENCES


The ethics of psychology in the age of the globalized therapeutic culture

Chapter 26

Doing psychology amidst a ‘crisis’ in capitalism:
The relevance of situationism and psychogeography for studying environments

Alexander J. Bridger
University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom

SUMMARY

New social conditions call for new theoretically informed psychology approaches to be developed. This is particularly the case with reference to the recent events held in public environments such as Occupy Wall Street, as well as recent demonstrations and riots concerning tuition fees, capitalism and the banking crisis across the globe. Focusing on towns and cities including Huddersfield, Manchester, London, New York and Thessaloniki, I will make an argument for the development of psychogeographical mobile methods of investigation such as walking, map making and photography to study social processes including consumerism, privatization and the use of surveillance in towns and cities. I will refer to the work of the situationists in relation to critical psychology, cultural geography and political architectural theory to conceptualise how to study peoples’ experiences of urban environments as well as to configure what a situationist informed methodology of environments would look like.

INTRODUCTION

New social conditions call for new theoretically informed approaches in psychology to be considered. With the recent occupations of ‘public’ environments at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, UK and Zuccotti Park in Wall Street, USA, as well as the recent demonstrations in countries such as England and Greece, people are actively raising questions such as who owns the so called “public” environments of towns and cities and what alternative modes of social organization need to emerge. As these are inherently political questions being raised regarding how society should be governed, who owns “public” spaces and what alternative modes of living could emerge, it makes sense to consider how to conduct theoretically informed psychology research in a more political manner. This paper argues that theoretical psychologists should consider the potential political impact of environments in how people make sense of and use environments as well as to begin to consider what alternative modes of organization/living/being could emerge. This then raises questions as to what types of theories and methods could be used in psychology; and here I outline how the practices of the Situationist International can be connected with recent work in critical psychology on the study of urban environments in relation to geographical and political architectural theory. Therefore, the research epistemology here is trans-disciplinary. This work will outline how social processes such as consumerism, privatization and surveillance can be studied through recently conceptualized ‘mobile’ data collection methods such as walking, map making and photography. In attempting to address these questions and themes of the research, I
will refer to my ongoing research, which has been conducted in towns and cities including Huddersfield, Manchester, London, New York and Thessaloniki. Moreover, it should also be noted that the changing shape of cities through gentrification and redevelopment is also important for understanding the impacts on peoples’ experiences and how they go about with their daily lives.

However, having reviewed current research in psychology on the study of environments, there are several key limitations. I agree with Hodgetts et al. (2010, p. 287), that environments should not been seen to be simply “backdrops to social psychological processes.” Rather the aims should be to study individuals’ lived experiences of the world (Ingold, 1993) as well as to consider wider cultural, political and ideological processes. These processes can be mapped into social environments via methods such as psychogeography and situationism, which will be introduced and explained in the course of this paper. Indeed, the urban theorist, Sadler (1998) argued that urban environments are congealed with Puritanism, capitalism and the spectacle. This then raises the question as to how one would go about studying environments (Bridger, 2010, 2011; Hodgetts et al., 2010, 2011). In work by Bridger (2010, 2011) and Hodgetts et al. (2010, 2011), “mobile” methods such as walking and photographic methods have been developed and used. One of the limits of current research in psychology is the sedentary nature of much of qualitative work (Sheller & Urry, 2000), whereby how people experience and move through environments is not studied in any great detail. However, there has been an emergence of new mobile methods such as bimbling (Anderson, 2004), go-along research (Kusenbach, 2003), photographic methods (Hodgetts et al. 2010; Radley et al., 2010), and psychogeographical research (Bridger, 2010, 2011). One way to further develop mobile-based research is to consider the role of the political in research. Therefore we will now consider the extent to which the situationist practice of psychogeography could be used in qualitative research in psychology.

**PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY AND SITUATION**

Whilst the situationists were not psychologists, nor were they academics, they did write about and produced films, comics and maps about important social situations—including the gentrification of cities such as Paris, the Algerian conflict as well as the events of May 1968. What they aimed to do was to critique and challenge the capitalist order of things and to think of what non-capitalist society could look like. They did this through two tactics, namely “detournement” and the “dérive.” Detournement was basically a tactic to question, subvert and change the meanings of text and images from newspapers, political speeches, films and comics. The dérive referred to a tactic, which was related to the practice of psychogeography and walking. Within this practice, the situationists would investigate towns and cities with the aim of being to study the effects of environments on behavior as well as to begin to envision what non-capitalist environments could look like. Further aims were to take oneself out of one’s ordinary routes of travel, routine behaviours and social obligations in order to thoroughly disorientate and disassociate oneself, so that one would be more open and would react more spontaneously to one’s surroundings. Kotanyi and Vaneigem (1961, n.p.) argued that one first aim of such work should be to “enable people to stop identifying with their surroundings and with model patterns of behaviour.” Debord (1958, n.p.) stated:
Dérives involve playful constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll. In a dérive, one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities and all other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. Chance is less an important factor in this activity than one might think: from a dérive point of view, cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly encourage and discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.

This practice was part of what Debord referred to as psychogeography: “Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise law and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviours of individuals” (Debord, 1955, n.p.). Hence, the study and recording of one’s experiences of moving through environments was done in order to begin to think how to change these places. Situationist practices were quite playful, anti-scientific and anti-methodological and they aimed to question and negate the capitalist formation of environments. Vaneigem (1967, n.p.) referred to the importance of play as a political practice and stated that “The desire to play has returned to destroy the hierarchical society which banished it. At the same time it is setting up a new type of society, one based on real participation.” Hence play was construed as a political act in order to intervene and change social norms, situations and environments. In order to make sense of the changing form of environments and therein, of society, the situationists deployed various methods such as using maps of other cities and continuous drifts which would sometimes take place for many days. They also wrote accounts of urban investigations (Khatib, 1958) as well as producing subverted maps of cities (Debord & Jorn, 1956). As situationist tactics were quite anarchic, anti-methodological and a-theoretical, they never outlined how to do psychogeographical research. Chhtcheglov (1958) and Debord (1958) both claimed that psychogeography could be both a science and an art, though it should also be added that the situationists would not have wanted their work to be formulated as an “academic” methodology or perspective, as they were concerned that their work be recuperated by those in power and that this would not serve the interests of class struggle. Hence, the questions that the situationists have raised here do need to be taken into account when considering whether one can draw on their work in qualitative research in psychology.

CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY, CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY, CULTURAL STUDIES AND ARCHITECTURAL THEORY

There is a distinct lack of research in psychology ON how to politically analyse environments (Hayes, 2003). However, there are two politically based studies of environments that are worth discussion here. First of all, I draw particular inspiration from the work of Burnett et al. (2004), whom conducted a dérive in London. They drew on a key psychogeographical document written by Debord (1958), which documents some of the key theoretical assumptions of dérives. Their aims were as follows:

Our research question was the extent to which the dérive, as a psychogeographic tool, could be operationalised by women, whose time, and most usually, travels through space, were/are structured by the contingent demands of paid
employment, and in some cases children and other dependant small animals. 
(Burnett et al., 2004, p. 118)

What is particularly illuminating about their work is that they took into account how their gendered position, work and family roles shaped the research produced. This is not something that the situationists addressed in their work. A key limitation of the situationists’ work was that they did not take into account how their standpoint shaped how they made sense of environments. As I take a qualitative, reflexive approach to research, it is as important to consider how one’s position in research shapes what one writes about. Hence it is relevant to draw on research from autoethnography (Ellis, 2000) to consider one’s reflexive standpoint. Autoethnographical research is written in the form of stories, poetry and photographs rather than academic writing (Ellis, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnographical work lends itself quite well to psychogeographical writing, which is also quite often literary and poetic (e.g., the work of Sinclair, 2002). However, there has been some critique levelled at autoethnographic methods as it is assumed to be quite individualistic (Atkinson, 1997). A response to that claim is to acknowledge individualistic responses as being culturally, historically and politically situated (Holt, 2003). What can therefore be done here is to take an autoethnographical approach in relation to drawing on the situationist practice of psychogeography. How we make sense of and document everyday life is largely through writing, photography and art, so it makes sense to make use of documentary approaches such as writing narratives, taking photographs, and making reflexive maps. Whilst these methods may not be considered as “scientific,” they are how we see, think about and document the world. Moreover, Hodggetts et al. (2008) argue that it is important to draw on a variety of different methods which should include seeing, writing and observation techniques. I would also not argue that my experience could be considered to be representative of any one else’s experiences. I only aim to provide an account of my standpoint and to also consider how wider processes of the neoliberalisation of place can impact on the design and use of towns and cities.

Furthermore, the work of Burnett et al. (2004) is useful to see what an “academic” account of a dérèe could look like as they wrote the account of the research as a linear narrative which was interspersed with photographs to document places investigated. What they found was that it was actually quite difficult to achieve disassociation and disorientation in London:

In charting our daily journeys, what emerged forcefully, was the impossibility of disorientation within the structuring contingencies of our everydayness. The only way to disrupt that patterning of our everydayness was to create specific situations such as wearing an item of headgear throughout one day, or the “spoil yourself directive. (Burnett et al., 2004, p. 118)

The second paper also demonstrates an emergence of psychogeographical work in psychology, which is by a Spanish group called Grup de Lesianes Feministes (2005). They have questioned how people are positioned as “consumer-market subjects.” They argue that public environments should be taken over for people to collectively create new types of “social, sexual and affective relations” (Grup de Lesianes Feministes, 2005, p. 109). This paper is important to consider the consumerist privatisation of public places. This work is directly relevant to some of the key themes underpinning the psychogeographical work that I conduct.
METHODOLOGY AND THE PROCESS OF PSYCHOGEOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH

Having provided a background to the work of the situationists, their practice of psychogeography and briefly outlining key psychogeographical psychology studies, I will first of all discuss the reflexive and theoretical underpinnings of the work and then explain briefly how one would conduct psychogeographical psychology research.

As this work is part of an ongoing project to investigate regeneration and the neoliberalisation of towns and cities in the world, there are several different key locations in which I have undertaken ongoing psychogeographical research, including Huddersfield, Manchester, London, New York and Thessaloniki. First of all, Manchester was chosen as a location because this was an environment in which I wanted to find out how to do psychogeography work. Furthermore I have been interested in how Manchester has been redeveloped in the aftermath of the Irish Republican Army bomb attack, which took place in 1996. Huddersfield, Manchester and Thessaloniki have all been sites of psychogeographical investigations as these are places in which I have lived in and/or visited for many years and in which I wished to learn more about their form and political structures as well as to study how consumerism, surveillance and privatization is spatialised within these environments. New York was chosen as a destination in which to do psychogeographical research based on my PhD research (see Bridger, 2010, 2011). Hence I have a particular connection to these places, as my memories are situated in particular places. In these investigations I initially began with research questions such as considering the extent to which the situationist practice of psychogeography could be used in qualitative psychology research, as well as exploring the impact of urban development in relation to themes such as consumerism, the privatization of urban environments as well as surveillance of citizens in towns and cities. The implications of this work have always been to begin to consider what alternative non-capitalist modes of organization could emerge. Hence the aims of my research have been quite political in terms of not only considering how to go about understanding and making sense of environments, but also to begin to consider how to go about changing the “order of things.” In terms of the actual process of doing this sort of research, I have often collected archival material including old maps of places which I have investigated, as well as newspaper articles (for example, The Guardian, the Wall Street Journal and Manchester Evening News), photographs and ballads (Manchester Ballads for example).

Now moving onto considering how one would go about conducting psychogeographical psychology research, it is first of all necessary to begin with thinking of general questions to underpin this type of work. One key document, which I refer to in my psychogeographical psychology practice, is by Khatib (1958), whom extensively explored the Les Halles district in Paris. He raised particular questions which are worthy of consideration in doing psychogeographical research in psychology, which includes: how do we experience places, what are the effects of particular places, what sorts of emotions are evoked in places, what changes in ambience are experienced, what sorts of encounters take place and what sorts of architectural changes need to occur and how should environments be changed? Having considered questions, which would underpin how one would study places, the next step in doing this type of research is to consider what themes should underpin research. The themes that I would consider important to include are: the privatisation of public spaces, the surveillance of citizens...
and consumerism. In terms of the actual process of investigating environments psychogeography I have used techniques such as using maps of other places and affixing directions onto dice and cards in order to take myself out of the habitual ways in which I would move through towns and cities and also in order to disorientate and disassociate myself from places. In terms of how one would document one’s experiences of psychogeographical research, this would include taking notes (hand written or electronic), a camera and various maps (not necessarily all relating to the places planning to be investigated). In relation to photographic documentary methods, with recent advancements in photo technology in mobile phones, this has now become a fast and simple way to take photos whilst doing psychogeographical work. Furthermore the iPhone notebook is also a useful and unobtrusive way to make notes and can be used to make notes on one’s experiences of being in places. Photography should be a central part of conducting research in environments as it is a way in which to capture ‘moments’ in places as well as to document important themes, which are of relevance to the research. One can draw on photo-voice methods (Riley & Manias, 2007) and do this work autoethnographically, highlighting what is of importance. Photography is important in terms of visually documenting what one sees when on dérives. To take a photograph of a place or situation is to document a “moment.” However, I do not aim for a tourist form of taking photographs of key landmarks and places. Instead the aims should be to take photographs of people, places and situations, which are deemed of importance, similar in a sense to the photo-voice method (Riley & Manias, 2007). Though one should add that photographs do not give readers direct access to the experiences and thoughts of photographers (Bordieu, 1990) and images provide only partial stories (Hodgetts et al., 2007). When I use photography, I would take photographs which would fit with key themes of research such as the privatization of spaces, consumerism and the surveillance of citizens. I would photograph, for example, the arrangement of CCTV cameras, public spaces which have become privatised and also sites which had undergone regeneration, had been demolished and which represented important historical sites of conflict (such as the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester). One’s experience of being in certain places would then inform the write up of a psychogeographical investigation, and often this would be written as a linear narrative which would be interspersed with photographs, reflective maps and references to relevant writers, speakers and activists. In addition to the write up of a dérive, one could also produce reflective maps. What one can do here is to take old and new maps of places investigated and subvert these documents to produce maps which can reflect something of one’s experiences of those environments as well as mapping out relevant social themes such as surveillance, power and consumerism. But as well as producing new maps of areas investigated, it is also important to write about how one produces such maps, which is probably more akin to how artists would discuss how they produced their work, rather than with traditional experimental research where one would discuss the research questions, data collection methods, ethical issues, analyse the data and provide clear conclusions.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have provided an introduction to how the work of the situationists can be used to develop psychogeographical psychology research. However, psychogeography has come under some critique from literary writers such as Papadimitriou (2010), who
argue that psychogeography has become too much of a fashionable way to criticise and “sneer” at the consumerist ordering of towns of cities. Instead, he argues for a topographical approach to studying environments, whereby he studies the beauteous form and shape of rural and urban landscapes (Papadimitriou, 2010). Moreover, it should also be noted that much of the academic research that I have undertaken in towns and cities such as Manchester, Thessaloniki and London has been informed by my involvement in various activist work (particularly in Manchester) such as organizing walks and talks about psychogeography, situationism and radical politics in places such as the Basement Social Centre in Manchester and other community, art and activist centres such as the Zion Centre in Manchester. I believe it is important to consider the relationship between research and everyday life and that it is important to be involved in academic, activist and artistic work. Moreover, one’s academic research writing can be informed through writing in non-academic forums such as writing blogs and fanzines, of which I have been involved in with the Phoenix fanzine and the Bored in the City Collective blog. Indeed, urban theorists such as Pinder (2005) argue that these sorts of practices can contribute to developing new critical approaches to studying environments. Furthermore, as this sort of work keys into questions regarding the organization of space, it is thus necessary to do work that engages with the public and which can be produced for different forums, hence the need to participate in academic, artistic and activist work. However, it could also be argued that this way of understanding place, has been somewhat co-opted by those in power. Bassett (2004, p. 408) raises the following important question: “Can one use Situationist tools for an academic exercise in this kind of way without effectively de-radicalising them to the extent that they become lifeless and un-illuminating?” Furthermore, Plant (1992) states that academics that do radical research reproduce the elitism of their academic positions. I think that one can respond to these particular changes by arguing for the need to do critical and radical work not just in one’s research, but in all areas of life. Whilst walking does not actually create any physical changes to environments, it does enable one to consider the social formation of places, how one experiences environments and what needs to be changed in society. Walking could then be considered as a form of political intervention, where one aims to “occupy” places, to reconsider the social environment and to begin to envison new formations of places. Whether one does this by drawing on the situationist practice of psychogeography or other “radical” ways to study places such as deep topography, the ultimate aims are to make sense of environments in order to begin to think about changing places and to change the dominant capitalist order of things. The extent to which qualitative research can be radical and the extent to which it can create social changes in society are the sorts of questions that we should be asking in our research.

REFERENCES


RECONSIDERING WORK CREATED IN PAST CONDITIONS
Chapter 27

Dialogue between mediation and style

Cor Baerveldt

University of Alberta, Canada

SUMMARY

The notion of dialogicality has been used in socio-cultural psychology to substitute a genuinely social account of personhood for the fruitless dichotomy of culture and self. Ironically, whereas the dialogism of Bakhtin offers indeed a lot to the cultural psychological understanding of personal sense-making, most dialogical theories of the self remain oblivious to the embodied practical embedding of dialogical processes, focusing almost exclusively on non-situated interpersonal interaction and disembedded social and internal “positioning.” While mediational thinkers like Valsiner have emphasized the importance of psychological “distancing” in semiotic processes, dialogical self-theorists following the work of Hermans remain caught up in a perspective that privileges non-mediated interaction. Strikingly, Bakhtin’s understanding of dialogicality already offers an alternative to mediational thinking that avoids the pitfalls of naïve immediacy. It is the later work of Merleau-Ponty, however, that helps us to bring the dialogical understanding to full ontological explication, by recognizing a deeper dialogicality in the stylized and deeply equivocal nature of human expression.

INTRODUCTION

Dialogicality is a notion that has been used in socio-cultural psychology both to offer a genuinely social account of personhood and to elaborate the Vygotskyan idea of the semiotic mediation of our higher mental functions. However, whereas the dialogism of Bakhtin offers indeed a lot to the cultural psychological understanding of sense-making, most dialogical theories of the self have remained strikingly oblivious to the embodied and practical embedding of dialogical processes, focusing almost exclusively on non-situated interpersonal interaction and disembedded social and internal “positioning.” While mediational thinkers like Valsiner have emphasized the importance of psychological distancing in understanding semiotic processes, dialogical self-theorists following the work of Hermans (e.g. Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992; Hermans & Kempen, 1993) remain caught up in a perspective that naively privileges non-mediated interaction. In recent years, however, some theorists have proposed a semiotic dialogism in an attempt to reconcile Dialogical Self Theory (DST) with Vygotsky’s dialectic psychology (e.g. Leiman, 2002; Valsiner, 2005). Others, however, have pointed out the fundamentally different implications of dialogic vs. dialectic understandings of meaning (e.g., Wegerif, 2008). In this paper I will argue that the semiotic or mediational account of the self cannot truly rescue DST from naïve immediacy. For lack of an adequate social ontology, both are marred by an understanding of dialogicality that is too narrow and unable to articulate the inherent normativity of dialogical agency. Ironically, the seeds for a more adequate dialogical ontology can already be found in the work of Bakhtin himself. I will argue, however, that it is particularly in the later work of the
philosopher Merleau-Ponty that we can find an attempt to bring the notion of dialogicality to its full ontological implications.

THE FALLACY OF NARROW PRAGMATISM

Both Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin have become household names among psychologists who seek to develop a genuinely cultural and historical psychology. Unfortunately, both social thinkers tend to be interpreted in light of what Blunden (2007) has called narrow pragmatism. In the case of Vygotsky this narrow pragmatist interpretation tends to lead to a predominantly instrumental understanding of tool use and tool mediated action, one that cuts Vygotsky’s theory of psychological development off from its roots within a Marxist and Hegelian account of praxis (e.g., see Newman & Holzman, 1993). In the case of Bakhtin it leads to an interpretation of dialogue as merely rejoinders in conversation or as some kind of discursive positioning, effectively removing the dialogical account from Bakhtin’s own concern with the deeply normative communal and embodied styles he called speech genres (Cresswell & Baeveldt, 2009, 2011). Blunden describes narrow pragmatism as the view that social life can essentially be understood as merely a sequence of unmediated interactions between individuals. On that view, meaning is constantly negotiated anew with each interaction between individuals and history is seen as no more than a series of discrete events without any structure binding them together other than individual motives, believes, valuations etc.

Narrow pragmatism stands in strong contrast with the Hegelian and Marxist tradition that informs both Vygotsky and Bakhtin, but also with the social thought of preeminent thinkers in the American pragmatist tradition, like John Dewey and George Herbert Mead. Unlike narrow pragmatism, broad pragmatism, according to Blunden, recognizes that all human relations are mediated and that this mediation depends on a pre-existing material culture (e.g., labor, artifacts, tools, mass media, literature), inherited and modified by each generation. Moreover, the broad pragmatist view recognizes that the relations inhering in material culture transcend the intentions of the individuals using them.

 Ironically, whereas Hermans, in his interpretation of Bakhtin, situates himself explicitly in the tradition of William James and George Herbert Mead (see Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1993), Mead, like Bakhtin was indeed careful to avoid the implications of a narrow pragmatist view of social conduct. In fact, both Mead and Bakhtin were thorough, yet critical readers of Hegel. Both understood interpersonal interaction and reflective thought to be situated against a background of non-reflective, habitual practice; and both eschewed the reduction of the social to mere interpersonal relations. Hence, when Bakhtin poses a dialogical alternative to the Hegelian dialectics that requires each opposition to be overcome in a higher order synthesis, he has already absorbed enough of Hegel to avoid falling back into the naïve immediacy of individuals simply negotiating meaning on the spot, as if they were without history, tradition and material culture.

As is well known, Bakhtin critiques Hegel for treating contrasting or opposing perspectives on reality as mere stages in a single, linear development. Bakhtin, instead, admires Dostoevsky, who presents in his novels “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses” which unfold in the course of the novel without each becoming “a simple object of the author’s consciousness.” Hegel’s dialectics,
according to Bakhtin, is a stripped-down dialogue; a dialogue abstracted from the lives real of embodied actors:

Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that’s how you get dialectics. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 147)

Bakhtin wants us to see that the interactions and contradictions of the different tones and viewpoints in a genuinely expressive text are not something to be overcome, but something that itself is generative of meaning or significance. Still, while the supposed difference between dialectical and dialogical accounts of meaning is now a standard element in the adaptation of Bakhtin’s work for psychology, the use of the terms in much of the psychological literature is selective at best. As was argued more extensively elsewhere (e.g., Cresswell & Baerveldt, 2009, 2011) Bakhtin’s dialogism is not primarily concerned with interpersonal exchange, but with the juxtaposition of speech genres. A speech genre refers for Bakhtin (1986) to the deeply embodied normative style of an entire speech community, as enacted in a generic phonology, jargon, bodily style and ideological stance. What intrigued Bakhtin in the novels of Dostoevsky was the way the points of view of his heroes were expressive of the social body of entire speech communities (Bakhtin, 1984).

In light of this it is odd that Bakhtin is so readily taken up as a champion of the idea of semiotic mediation. Indeed, it is this interpretation of Bakhtin that has allowed neo-Vygotskian thinkers like James Wertsch (1991) to reconcile Bakhtin’s dialogism with the stripped-down version of Vygotsky’s dialectical psychology. Even though Wertsch and adherents to DST embrace Bakhtin’s focus on the utterance as the real unit of speech communication, they tend to interpret the utterance in a narrow pragmatist way, thus taking a subtle but decisive step away from the idea of language as lived historical practice. Language or speech is reduced to a heterogeneous semiotic tool kit that merely “mediates” human action and speech genres are depicted as things that can be freely taken up and used depending on the particular activity settings or spheres of life to which they are suited. The self-sufficient language user is substituted for the human agent who fully lives, works and expresses herself in language.

### MERLEAU-PONTY AND THE NORMATIVITY OF DIALOGICAL PRACTICE

The tendency for accounts of dialogical agency to slide back into narrow pragmatism may be an indication that the notion of dialogicality has not been sufficiently thought through in terms of its ontological implications. One possible remedy to this shortcoming is to return to the social thought of Hegel and Marx. Merleau-Ponty saw Marx as providing not just an economic theory, but also an anthropology. Marx, according to Merleau-Ponty, described the economic system as a “relationship between persons mediated by things.” Yet, by making “things” into commodities, capitalism conceals the human relationships that gave rise to them and personal relationships tend to be swallowed up almost entirely into “things.” If human relationships are indeed mediated by things, yet things are concealed human relationships, the challenge for an anthropology, but also for a genuinely cultural and historical psychology, would be to understand the deeply paradoxical and recursive nature of human relationships that allows its products to be cut off from its principles of production. To maintain the
language of mediation in this regard, would lead to the paradoxical conclusion that human relationships are mediated by human relationships. This raises the question whether the language of mediation is truly compatible with the language of human relationships. For example, do we use human relationships in the same way we use tools or signs? And by extension, do we appropriate the living voices of others much in the same way as we internalize, according to Vygotsky, the use of tools and signs? As for the former, Marx, who already long before Bakhtin critiqued Hegel’s dialectics for starting out in abstraction, is clearly poking fun at Hegel when he writes about the implications of such a mediational view of human relationships:

This is a kind of mutual reconciliation society. It is as if a man stepped between two opponents, only to have one of them immediately step between the mediator and the other opponent. It is like the story of the man and wife who quarreled and the doctor who wished to mediate between them, whereupon the wife soon had to step between the doctor and her husband, and then the husband between his wife and the doctor. It is like the lion in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* who exclaims:

“I am the lion, and I am not the lion, but Snug.” (Marx, 1883/1970, p. 88)

We are indeed confronted with a paradox. Where mediation first seemed to be a way to rescue the dialogical account from narrow pragmatism and naïve immediacy, the mediational view now seems to dissolve again into an unstable relational account, where one moment a position is the extreme and the next it is the mediation between extremes. This vacillation between the mediational and the relational becomes apparent as well when an account of development as the internalization of sign use is paired with an account of sign use as the outcome of ontogenetic development. In an influential social-pragmatic account of the cultural origins of human cognition, Michael Tomasello (Tomasello, 1999) offers a view of sign-use that focuses on the innate human ability to engage in joint attention. In this view, declarative sign use is characterized by a triadic structure, in which the involved parties mutually understand that the sign is intended as a way to direct the other party’s attention. Almost without exception, the paradigmatic case in genetic accounts like this is that of declarative pointing, perhaps because in this case the ability to read other people intentions is simply the ability to follow in their attention as indicated by direction of sight. However, this seeming univocality is obviously lacking in all those situations where a mutual understanding of intentions relies on the conventionality of culturally orchestrated practices, such as is the case in actions that involve culturally constituted signs. This is because such intentions reside not in individual minds, but inhere rather in the normativity of those practices. Therefore, attempts to build up an account of semiotic competence from individual social-cognitive abilities fail, precisely because “reading” other people’s intentions requires one’s previous socialization in a normatively structured world. In social-pragmatic as well as in interpersonal accounts of sense-making, it is this normativity that remains unarticulated, since social practice is mistaken for social interaction.

Of course it is also this normativity that on the mediational account inheres in the pre-existing material and symbolic culture. Vygotsky is credited for having recognized the genetic link between cultural “meaning” and personal “sense” by using the notion of appropriation (Russian: prisvoenie; German: Aneignung). However, whereas Vygotsky sees the dialectical relation of “meaning” and “sense” as continuously going through transformations, present-day semiotic accounts of cultural learning, like Valsiner’s, have emphasized the importance of the inner/outer contrast and speak of this link as a process of internalization (Valsiner, 1998). Yet, once ontogenetic development is
understood as the internalization of pre-existing mediational means, it becomes hard to understand how any of those means come to make sense in the personal lives of cultural agents. Elsewhere (Baerveldt & Verheggen, 2012) we argued that to give a mediational or semiotic account of sense-making is to explain sense-making on the basis of sense already made. It is to introduce into an account of human relationships a set of quasi-independent entities called “signs” whose semiotic or regulatory power is assumed in advance, as if this power inheres in those signs and not in the consensual relations by which those signs are enacted and re-enacted in the lives of actual participants to the culture.

If a non-mediational dialogism can be said to overlook the normativity that inheres in material and symbolic culture, the semiotic or mediational account can be said to take this normativity for granted without truly explaining its genesis. In both cases, what is lacking is precisely the kind of social ontology that would help us to understand how a normative space opens up in the first place. What is it that allows something to show up as meaningful at all? What allows us to be responsive to a world that demands to be expressed in the proper way? An adequate social ontology can neither resort to already meaningful semiotic means, nor to bare interpersonal relationships. Instead, it would have to show how the generic normativity of culture is always already implied in each personal expression and how our way of being-in-the-world always already opens up a generative space of dialogue. It is for the outlines of such a social ontology that we may turn to the work of Merleau-Ponty.

**TOWARD A RADICALLY DIALOGICAL SOCIAL ONTOLOGY**

Although there is no evidence that Bakhtin and Merleau-Ponty influenced each other directly, it is easy to see that they share some common influences, particularly through the works of Hegel and Marx, but also Saussure. It seems that Merleau-Ponty read Saussure somewhat more approvingly, but it is clear that like Bakhtin he was not primarily interested in language as an abstract diacritical system, but in living speech practice. Hence, rather than the problem of the relation between the signifier and the signified, Merleau-Ponty focused on the question of linguistic expression and understanding. As early as in the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty understood word meaning genetically: “What remains to me of the word once learned is its style as constituted by its formation and sound” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 180). Yet, Merleau-Ponty also described our entry into the normative world of speech in a way that seems to avoid the language of semiotic mediation. Words, he said, are like *gestures* and as gestures they *express* rather than mediate what they mean. Once acquired, words have their own physiognomy: they mean without us having to interpret them intellectually and their meaning lies at the surface just like the meaning of our gestures. Words “carry a top coating of meaning which sticks to them, and which presents the thought as a style” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 182). The word doesn’t need to be linked to its meaning, since as a phonological gesture it belongs to the normative field of bodily practice which speaker and listener already have in common: “Its generality, is not that of the idea, but that of a behavioral style ‘understood’ by my body” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 403).

The notion of style appears over and over again in Merleau-Ponty’s work in the period between the publication of the *Phénoménologie de la perception* in 1945 and his untimely dead in 1961. This is not the place to discuss in detail the philosophical
problems Merleau-Ponty saw himself confronted with in that period, but what makes his work relevant to our current discussion is that Merleau-Ponty seems to have struggled particularly with the question how to reconcile the concretely embodied subject of perception and action with an account of history and culture as already normatively structured. In the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty had approached style and speech largely from the perspective of the individual speaker, rather than from the perspective of language as an institution or as a historical practice. Merleau-Ponty’s main concern there was the recovery of the body-subject from the objectifying approach of body and language as mere objects or things. In the years after publishing the *Phenomenology of Perception*, however, Merleau-Ponty began to realize that his design for an embodied theory of language and perception had in a crucial way not been radical enough. He recognized that it failed to fully make the connection between language as personal expression and language as a normative system. Merleau-Ponty wanted to understand the passage from what he had earlier called *perceptual faith* to the common reality of a socio-historical world and he hoped that this passage could be understood in terms of a theory of expression.

A decisive shift in Merleau-Ponty’s thinking took place in the decade before his death, when Merleau-Ponty seems to have been working on several different projects, most of which would either be abandoned or remain unfinished. From the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty maintained the idea that through the habitual powers of the body we acquire a general style of being in the world as a coherent deformation of a style we already receive at birth. In the unfinished manuscripts and working notes posthumously published as *The Visible and the Invisible* he attempted to work out the ontological implications of this in the idea of the “flesh.” Flesh is neither the individual body, nor merely the abstract materiality of the world, but a general style in which self, other, and world participate. In the flesh, says Merleau-Ponty, “there is no identity, nor non-identity, or coincidence, there is inside and outside turning about one another” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 264). In his posthumous working notes Merleau-Ponty can be seen to struggle to find a new language in which “things” and “bodies” appear not as discrete entities, but as part of a field of divergences in which things pass over in each other, “pivot” and “hinge” upon one another, are “pregnant” with one another and as such form a common style. Merleau-Ponty’s notion of style presents a radical dialogism, in which self and other are not merely positioned, but implied in one another in a way that guarantees both their intimacy and their differentiation.

It could be argued that Merleau-Ponty’s struggle to find an ontological principle between structure and lived experience is not unlike Bakhtin’s, but Merleau-Ponty tries to bring the idea of a primordial and deeply embodied dialogicality to further ontological explication. Like Bakhtin, Merleau-Ponty turned to literature, but also to visual art as a paradigm for understanding perception and expression in general. A great artist is for Merleau-Ponty someone who through skillful mastery of expressive techniques is able to gather the meanings of our disparate practices and unify them in a particular expressive understanding. This expressive understanding always implies the world as a whole and offers a dialogical response to the generic style of the culturally orchestrated practices. Expressive freedom is acquired not by the internalization of semiotic tools, but by the *appropriation* of the cultural norms for perceiving and expressing:
For each painter style is the system of equivalences that he makes for himself which manifests the world he sees. It is the universal index of coherent deformation by which he concentrates the still scattered meaning of his perception and makes it exist expressly. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 74)

Where mediatial thinkers have often preferred the language of internalization and externalization (for a discussion, see Valsiner, 1998, pp. 100 ff.), I argue that the notion of appropriation better suits a cultural psychology grounded in the social ontology of style. From this point of view, the “inner” and the “outer” are not just pseudo-locations, but modalities of the same expressive activity. Appropriation implies simultaneously that we become attuned to what is normative or “proper” and that we are making this normativity “our own.” For Merleau-Ponty, style is therefore always a coherent deformation of a norm. Yet, the “norm” is never a fixed structure, a static set of rules, or a collection of mediational tools. Each norm is itself a style, a deformation of the implicit logos of concrete historical practice, a logos that itself remains without positive terms. Genuine form, says Merleau-Ponty, is always the birth of a norm and ontology must therefore orient itself to the Normierung, the active advent of styles.

DIALOGICALITY FROM MEDIATION TO STYLE

So where does this leave us in our attempt liberate dialogical expression from both naïve immediacy and semiotic mediation? Mediation, in the standard interpretation of Hegel, captures the idea that development is the consequence of contradictions or mutual negations that are ultimately superseded in a way that retains and preserves the original moments in a higher product. Dialogicality, on an equally standard neo-Bakhtinian account, conveys instead the idea that contradictions can be expressed as a juxtaposition of different unmerged positions. Dialogical Self theorists tend to appropriate Bakhtin’s dialogism by conceiving of the self as a dynamical system of relatively autonomous I-positions, each endowed with its own voice, capable of engaging with each other in dialogical exchange. However, it is precisely in its understanding of this dialogical exchange that DST shows its narrow pragmatist roots. Bakhtin did not understand dialogue as merely rejoinders in conversation or as dynamical spatial positioning. His understanding of dialogue was a truly generative one, one in which the simultaneous presence of multiple voices and speech genres allows them to resonate in ways that keeps giving rise to new meaning.

It is the idea that genuine expression is generative by simultaneously and “immediately” expressing seemingly contradictory moments that lies at the heart of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of style as well. Style neither supersedes, nor merely juxtaposes, but instead actively generates or produces significance through what Merleau-Ponty referred to as a reversibility of “inside” and “outside,” or the sentient and the sensible. This is the reason that a true masterwork, a classic, or a work of art can never be stripped from its style or pinned down on one ultimate meaning. To paraphrase a passage from Merleau-Ponty, reminiscent of Bakhtin’s above quoted critique of the Hegelian dialectics, to purge a classic from its style is to assume that its significance can be exhausted.

Style in this radical ontological sense can never be confronted or interrogated directly, so that we might render a descriptive account of it that would fully lay it out before us. Merleau-Ponty recognized that the understanding on an expression is itself a responsive expression and that style can only be recognized by style, that is, indirectly,
or obliquely. When we truly encounter each other in dialogue, we don’t merely hurl propositional content at each other, but we “resonate,” or “dwell” in a common style such that what we comprehend is a common world and not just the world of our agreements and disagreements. In Merleau-Ponty’s words, “to comprehend is not to constitute in intellectual immanence [but] to apprehend by coexistence, laterally, by the style, and thereby to attain at once the far-off reaches of this style and of this cultural apparatus” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 188). Herein lies the promise of a dialogicality in which the other is not just an imaginary position within the internal landscape of the self, but one with whom we truly have a world in common.

REFERENCES


Chapter 28

Re-actualizing Bergson’s concept of duration: The role of schematic memory in psychological life

Andrés Haye
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to explore the notions of “movement” and “understanding,” trying to show that Bergson offers a challenging view on the relationship between time and space, as well as on the important role played by schematic memory in verbal communication. I will discuss two main ideas. First, living beings consist in a process toward actualizing, in the form of action in space, tendencies of action rooted in past experience and taking part as “memory schemas” and “memory representations” guiding movement. Second, action schemas are not alternatives to representations; more basic and higher forms of memory work together to bring about the mixed quality of concrete experience. Overall, I try to offer a new light on Bergson’s account of psychological experience, putting together two aspects of his work that have been traditionally worked out separately, namely, temporality and language.

INTRODUCTION

The 2011 ISTP conference went under the title “Doing Psychology Under New Conditions.” New life conditions demand a critical revision of psychology in many different respects. Here I take the opportunity to focus one condition of contemporary psychology, namely, the need of concepts that could help us better understand the temporal nature of mind and culture, thus accounting for the relationship between time and experience. Despite the fact that this is an old issue, and that there is a large consensus on the importance of temporal dynamics, psychological theories are still today generally based on metaphors of space, like the memory storehouse or the neural network. Nevertheless, there is an increasing awareness that a key to studying psychological processes in accordance with that old consensus, would be to discuss the conception of the temporality of living organisms. In particular, I will draw mainly on Bergson’s Matter and Memory (1912/1896) to re-actualize in this context an old but fresh idea about the temporal and embodied nature of psychological consciousness.

The following quote expresses in a nutshell the theme of this talk: “A movement is learned when the body has been made to understand it” (Bergson, 1912/1896, p. 112). My aim is to explore the notions of “movement” and “body understanding,” trying to show that Bergson offers a challenging view on the relationship between time and space, as well as on the important role played by shematic memory in verbal communication. Instead of discussing Bergson’s theory in detail, here I will just point out two main ideas. First, living beings consist in a process toward actualizing, as action in space, tendencies of action rooted in past experience and taking part as “memory...
schemas” and “memory representations” guiding movement. Second, action schemas are not alternative to representations; more basic and higher forms of memory work together to bring about the mixed quality of concrete experience.

**TIME AND BEING**

The notion of duration is used by Bergson to account for the reality of movement as the kernel of both matter and spirit. Following the philosophy of change pioneered by Heraclitus, Bergson conceives of being in general as actualizing, as being not in a complete form but in transit, not as a state of act but as a process of becoming.

From this perspective, everything is in constant variation, a variation at one or another temporal scale, from highly compressed or “contracted” variation of matter to the more “distended” duration of conscious experience. This implies that duration, as the temporal reality of the process of actualization of the past, is not exclusive to the consciousness of living beings—which is the focus of most interpretations of Bergson. Extending duration to being means that every moving thing is incomplete and in a process of moving-toward or moving-against; in a process of change and of actualizing in this way or the other. This was discussed by Bergson in his doctoral thesis about the concept of local change in Aristotle.

According to this extension of duration to all matter, and to the link between being and moving, we can say that things are always actualizing existence in space, changing place, occupying an extension, keeping a spatial position, and so on. Although a particular focus of Bergson was to account for subjective experience on the basis of the temporal dynamics of living beings, a consideration of these more general links of time, being, and space may help to get a deeper interpretation.

**Living as active spacing**

In this context, living beings are characterized as self-moving things that bring about their past in order to orient movement with intelligence, that is, selecting relevant aspects of the past. In non-living beings, movement (or lack of movement) is the actualization of all the past trajectory of one thing in its interaction with the rest of matter. In most living beings, on the contrary, the past takes the form of motor habits that are constantly changing but concentrating, in a bodily tendency, tracts of the past trajectory relevant for routine action.

In addition, in some higher order living beings, the past takes the form of particular images or ideas, symbolic and discursive representations mediating the remembering of some unique episode or the application of some prior knowledge to orient current movement.

What is important to retain at this point is that self-movement and memory come together. By virtue of this active nature given by memory, living things can be truly conceived of as consisting in the process of spacing, in making space. This may sound like an unexpected interpretation, because most interpretations of Bergson would emphasize time and duration, and not space. However, for the author of *Matter and Memory* duration is the time of the becoming of space, neither an independent dimension nor a measure of movement in space. When growing, when acting on the environment and interacting with other living beings, an organism actively makes space, even if keeping still. Duration is understood as the time proper of the process of
growing or acting, from the initial organismic changes, still not unfolded as overt action, involved in preparing action in space. Memory representations and thinking are forms of duration because they prepare action in space, making the job of forming intelligent action, even if it never unfolds in space and remains as a desire or an alternative plan.

**Memory and virtual action**

Duration, in this view, is not the subjective side of temporality, but the temporal side of space-making. In less complex organisms, duration is reduced to perception, to the conscious experience of discriminating the possible ways of action. That is why Bergson defines perception as virtual action. In perceiving, the organism prepares and initiates the movements that can be performed according to the conditions of the environment and the interests of activity. These merely initiated movements are “virtual” in the sense that they participate as the background, so to speak, in the actualizing of movement in space.

In humans it is not so different: Duration may take the form of images or arguments, recollections or narrative fiction—forms of virtual action that detaches the organism from its immediate present of actualizing in space—and can even take the extreme form of philosophy as the free exploration of the virtual. Elaborated or basic forms of duration play the role of memory, that is, of a delay of mechanic response in order to introduce the past with intelligence in the formation of current action. When one is experiences a recollection, one is delaying action and penetrating the movement under formation (actualization) with a remote past experience. This is by no means an accidental possibility for Bergson, but the very nature of life, allowing for learning and novelty in behavior.

Again, what is important to keep in mind here is the idea that in living beings, duration is the inner temporality of singular and creative virtual movement made possible by the work of memory, which reintroduces the past into the actual movement. This temporality is the temporality of becoming, not the abstract time of instants. Duration is, then, a temporal variation—the wider, the more the past is made open in the formation of current action, and the more freedom gets the organism from its immediate present.

**SCHEMATIC MEMORY AND COMMUNICATION**

How is this idea of “subjective consciousness as preparation for motor action” to be understood? Since this may sound reasonable only for less complex living beings, one may also ask: Is this relationship between duration and space-making relevant to understanding human comprehension in social interaction?

The basic form of memory work is conceived of by Bergson in terms of schemas, understood as motor habits enabling perception, automatic recognition, and the transformation of virtual realities of imagination, remembering, and thinking, into movements in space. Schematic memory, as the impact of a “diagram” of the action to be performed, thus plays a crucial role in actualizing life.

Here it becomes a necessary distinction, considered as such by other classical authors in different formulations as well (Bartlett, 1964/1932; Mead, 1934; James, 1950/1890; Vygotsky, 1999/1934), between action schemas (or motor diagrams, the
term used in the English translation) on the one hand, and memory-images on the other. For instance, this seems to the case of Bartlett’s distinction between schematic memory and remembering, where the latter comes about only when schematic memory clashes. James distinction between elementary memory and remembering proper is in the same line. In my interpretation of Bergson, this is not a distinction between two alternative memory systems, but a relative distinction of two abstract, pure cases—motor habits and mental representations—between which concrete mixed memory processes do their job combining in varying degrees schematic tendencies and representational signs. Vygotsky and Mead also distinguish between the organization of behavior before and after its mediation by language. These distinctions may have deep grounds, but there is still the need to explain how elementary mechanisms and symbolic meaning function together. Instead of assuming that memory-images substitute action schemas along development, or that these two processes unfold as distinct systems eventually interacting among themselves, Bergson offers to contemporary psychology a new way of conceiving the distinction between action schemas and memory-images, whereby cognition and discourse are sensory-motor in nature and material existence is already infiltrated by meaning. To develop my point, I will show how Bergson sees the work of schematic memory operating in human psychological life, specifically in verbal interaction.

**Spoken language as spacing with others**

The movement of actualization in speaking beings is elaborated by Bergson as a specific case of actualization in living beings, by particularly analyzing comprehension in speech. I argue that Bergson’s perspective is that discursive life is not different from sensory-motor space-making. As a starting definition, consider language as overt actions that orient interlocutors towards the virtual movement of thought, that is, towards the virtual forces of the past that participate in the actualizing of a given subject. In speaking, the subject makes space not only in the sense that “the tongue and lips must articulate, the larynx must be brought into play for coronation, and the muscles of the chest must produce an expiratory movement of air” (Bergson, 1912/1896, p. 113); but more fundamentally because there is a collaborative effort in social interaction to move along with others. In speaking, then, the subject makes social space, for instance taking an attitudinal position before others or generating a common virtual action. Consider Bergson’s description of language comprehension, specifically attending to the role of words:

> [E]very language, whether elaborated or crude, leaves many more things to be understood than it is able to express. … [S]peech can only indicate by a few guideposts placed here and there the chief stages in the movement of thought. That is why I can indeed understand your speech if I start from a thought analogous to your own and follow its windings by the aid of verbal images which are so many signposts that show me the way from time to time. But I shall never be able to understand it if I start from the verbal images themselves, because between two consecutive verbal images there is a gulf which no amount of concrete representations can ever fill. For images can never be anything but things, and thought is a movement. (Bergson, 1912/1896, p. 125)

Verbal or sensory images used as signs in social interaction are, thus, never enough for understanding. Stated differently, symbolic representations as such are not the place of
meaning. Signs have a meaning insofar as they are part of a temporal and space-making movement of thought. At this point we can recollect our interpretations of Bergson and put forward the hypothesis that when understanding another’s utterance, one is delaying reaction and penetrating the interactive movement under formation (actualization) with virtual interactions, that is, with past experiences and possible situations that orient interlocutors along their co-spacing becoming. Paraphrasing Bergson, understanding is “motor accompaniment.” To comprehend a word is, then, to follow a thinking movement. Now, how can speakers follow the thinking movement of the other? The same way living beings follow any movement: in terms of schematic memory. But how can thinking be reduced to action and space-making?

As a living movement, thinking is also possible on the grounds of schematic memory, at least as one fundamental component of conscious experience as a mix, because this movement is a preparatory phase of a larger movement of acting in the spatial world. As such, thinking is a process of spacing ideas. The schematic mechanism in speech comprehension can be explained simply in terms of the spontaneous “tendency of verbal auditory impressions to prolong themselves in movements of articulation; a tendency which ... expresses itself by an internal repetition of the striking features of the words that are heard. Now our motor diagram is nothing else” (Bergson, 1912/1896, p. 113). When we listen to the words of another person with the desire to understand them:

Do we not ... feel that we are adopting a certain disposition, which varies with our interlocutor, with the language he speaks, with the nature of the ideas which he expresses—and varies, above all, with the general movement of his phrase, as though we were choosing the key in which our own intellect is called upon to play? The motor diagram, emphasizing his utterance, following through all its windings the curve of his thought, shows our thought the road. It is the empty vessel, which determines, by its form, the form which the fluid mass, rushing into it, already tends to take. (Bergson, 1912/1896, p. 121)

It can be stated with certainty that for Bergson, discourse (language in movement) is realized radically through, and not instead of sensory-motor space-making. In this sense, signs and utterances are firstly schematic components of movement, and not symbolic structures that could be understood in abstraction from body movements and action tendencies.

On the role of schemas in comprehension

Of course, thinking is not only this, but also, in a variable extent, the construction of representations that, with the help of the past experiences from whose remnants these representations are formed, serve as “aids” in “following” the “windings” of thought, as “signposts showing the way from time to time” in my constant interactions. But both motor schemas guiding habitual action and representations orienting the movement with signs join in bringing past experience to the dense present of becoming (indeed giving it such density!).

The past then modifies the present, directing the movement of becoming in some extent and in several manners, from motor habits enabling automatic behavior, to images and ideas enabling a resistance toward the dominant tendency of movement and an opportunity to virtually explore new possibilities. Schemas and representations are conceptually opposed and frequently work in conflict—that is why thinking and
remembering involve an effort. But this conflict between schematic conditioning and representation would then be a central component of the mixed experience of becoming from the past. In thinking, then, one is not only making space but spacing remembered experiences, as well as anticipations.

Bergson illustrated the power of the introduction of the past in the present, comparing speech comprehension of a native language with that of an unknown language. If the language spoken by two people is unknown by the listener, he or she will perceive sounds but will not hear them talk, because all sounds are alike. The speakers distinguish separate words from the same sonorous mass in which the listener, lacking the schematic memory of how to produce those words and discursive forms, distinguish nothing meaningful. “The question is, how can the knowledge of a language, which is only memory, modify ... present perception and cause some listeners actually to hear what others, in the same physical conditions, do not hear” (Bergson, 1912/1896, p. 109).

At this point we need to stress that for Bergson representations neither substitute habits, nor work in parallel (in a different brain structure or as a different process system). Bergson emphasizes the mixing of schemas and representations, instead of their independent functions, so to say, as a key for comprehension. Indeed, representations are constructed to help movement, and in their construction they become coordinated with sensory-motor schemas if they are to have any guiding or signaling role in the actualizing of past experiences and anticipations into spacing action.

The difference between those talking and the one not understanding the language relies on a much more able or not to articulate the virtual tendencies co-spacing becoming with the actual movement in the passing present. Not understanding a language is thus the lack of the correct schematic memory tendencies. Bergson goes even further by stating also the converse: Understanding a language is to be conditioned by the correct motor habits. In the case of language learning, the listener would start organizing nascent movements gradually and progressively capable of following the phrase-movement which is heard and of emphasizing its main articulations. According to Bergson these nascent movements are automatic reactions of internal accompaniment:

… at first undecided or uncoordinated, might become more precise by repetition; they would end by sketching a simplified figure in which the listener would find, in their main lines and principal directions, the very movements of the speaker. Thus would unfold itself in consciousness, under the form of nascent muscular sensations, the motor diagram, as it were, of the speech we hear. To adapt our hearing to a new language would then consist, at the outset, neither in modifying the crude sound nor in supplementing the sounds with memories; it would be to coordinate the motor tendencies of the muscular apparatus of the voice to the impressions of the ear; it would be to perfect the motor accompaniment. (Bergson, 1912/1896, pp. 110-111)

In other words, language learning does not modify elementary memory and perception of the living and spacing organism, but make them work for a different movement, for (ever) new forms of life and space. Representation does not supplement noisy sounds with meaningful memories, but articulates them into a blend in which sounds and memories can be distinguished only by abstraction.
CONCLUSION

With this, we are back where we began: “A movement is learned when the body has been made to understand it.” We are now, after pointing out the important role played by schematic memory in discursive communication, in a position to extrapolate this to thinking, rather than opposing it, and to realize that the actualizing of the virtual makes us understand the temporal and embodied nature of psychological consciousness. What are the theoretical and methodological implications of this notion of virtuality, as well as this notion of the mixture of functions, for the micro-genetic approach to psychological life? I have focused on two basic ideas which seem to be a reasonable support to guiding discussion of new questions.

First, living beings consist in a process toward actualizing tendencies of action rooted in past experience. This has important implications for the notion of time in psychology. The dominant conception of time in old and new psychological research is the common-sense idea that chronological coordination is a fundamental dimension of mind, so that by measuring cognition-times, or by analyzing neural or behavioral synchrony, psychology is in a good direction. It was Bergson who demonstrated that chronological time, and similar concepts such as the space-time structure of the universe, reduce time to space-forms and lose sight of the heterogeneous nature of temporality. His well-known suggestion was to approach both the mind and the universe as qualitative variations of becoming. However, showing that a chronometric psychology assumes a reductionist notion of time does not imply that psychological temporality can be studied without reference to space, as was suggested by Descartes and others. The critical point in contemporary psychology is to learn how to address the temporal nature of experience without falling to the side of physiological and behavioral chronometry, or to the other side of subjectivism, reducing temporality to represented time. Our reading of Bergson offers a critical perspective of this problem, but much is still to be developed conceptually and methodologically.

Second, representations are not alternatives to action schemas, but ingredients of the mixed quality of concrete experience. This has implications for a critical review of how elementary and higher-order psychological functions are to be articulated in contemporary psychological theorizing and research. If the symbolic world that language brings about in human experience is assumed to substitute the organismic mechanisms shared with animals, then psychological research may be deviated through the roads of “abstract culturalism.” If the symbolic runs in parallel to the bodily, we are not in a better position, but biased by the dominant approach to psychological experience from the point of view of the interaction of several different systems, favoring the independent study of biological and cultural systems. If the biological and the cultural aspects of psychological experience are conceived of not as real things or systems, but as indissoluble aspects of one process of becoming, then we will be better prepared to study mind without dividing it into separate functions such as perception, memory, decision making, imagination, attention, and so on, but following the unfolding of experiences that, for example, are perceptual and mnemonic at the same time, or show voluntary as well as non-conscious aspects. As another implication in this vein, consider that higher-order psychological functions would be of special interest because they might be responsible for the ever changing mixtures of which human experience is capable.
In addition to bringing Bergson’s ideas to contemporary discussions, I offer a special interpretation of Bergson’s account of psychological experience, putting together two aspects of his work that have been traditionally worked out separately, namely, temporality and discourse. On the one hand, most interpretations that focus on temporality elaborate on the notion of duration as radically different from space, without referencing the theme of spacing that I have emphasized at the outset. On the other hand, interpretations focused on discursive life take into account the radical difference between free thinking (philosophical “intuition”) and action conditioned by immediate circumstances, without paying attention to the mixed nature of language, as I have emphasized subsequently.

REFERENCES


Chapter 29

Fechner and Spinoza’s monism:
An old alternative to a still current problem

Ericka Marie Itokazu¹ & Arthur Arruda Leal Ferreira²
¹University of São Paulo (USP) and Researcher from FAPESP, Brazil
²Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and Researcher CNPq, Brazil

SUMMARY

The intention present in this work is: (1) to discuss the relations between Fechnerian metaphysics and Spinozian ontology; (2) to point out the similarities and differences between the theses of these authors, and (3) to assess how they could help us rethink the present mind-body question. Our aim is not only to make a simple comparison between these two systems of thought, but to question the current reductionist view of the mind-body problem. To present Fechner’s thought we will discuss: (1) the epistemic questions in nineteenth-century psychology related to Fechner’s psychophysics; (2) Fechner’s thought: the so-called “daylight view.” The detailed exposition of his thought opens the possibility of comparing it with Spinoza’s philosophy. To conclude we will try to highlight some of the current alternatives to the mind and body problem which are in tune with the views of Fechner and Spinoza.

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM

In most manuals of the history of psychology, Gustav Fechner is celebrated as the author who made the difficult and long awaited bridge from the pre-scientific to the scientific stage of psychology. This would have happened thanks to his psychophysical work in which a psychological measure of sensations was proposed, including in a highly complex general law related to physical stimulus. This is the so-called Fechner’s Law. Thanks to his contribution, presented in his Elements of Psychophysics, Fechner was considered as “a science superman whose life was devoted to ‘hardnosed research’” (Bringmann, Bringmann, & Medway, 1987, p. 244). Nevertheless, if we take his writings as a whole, we observe that the Elements of Psychophysics are like an island amidst metaphysical, religious, and aesthetic problems. Without trying to see in the author an unsuspected unity, it is necessary to ask about the relations between Elements of Psychophysics and others texts as The Soul Life of Plants, the Zend-Avesta, or Concerning Souls. Would there be in Fechner’s works a similar division as that assumed by the epistemologist Gaston Bachelard between day work (epistemology) and night work (poetry)? More than a rupture between science, religion, metaphysics and aesthetics, Fechner tried to create a single cosmovision (Jaeger, 1987). One must take Fechner’s work as a whole, without imposing any supposed doctrinal unity on it, in order to preserve its very tensions and problematizations. Considering this, how can psychophysics be articulated with this metaphysics? Here, psychophysics is considered as an empiric function of Fechner’s metaphysical and religious thought, the so-called “daylight view.” According to this, we will analyze the individual components of his
philosophy as they are presented in his metaphysical books (the panpsychism hypothesis, the animistic view of nature, the hierarchy of souls, and pantheism, among others), and discuss the relations with Spinozian ontology, in order to point out some similarities and differences that lead us to rethink the present mind-body question.

TWO DIFFERENT EPISTEMES: THE PSYCHOLOGIES OF THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES

The psychologies of the eighteenth century dealt with two major questions: (1) How are we to classify the faculties of our soul? (2) How are mind and body related, considering that they are two different substances? At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Auguste Comte established a differentiation between science (e.g., physics, mathematics) and metaphysics. When this difference was taken into account, there arose the need to classify psychology either as a respectable science or as mere metaphysics. In the first case, psychology would have to fulfill new demands: objectivity and mathematical formalization (Kant, 1989/1786). The attempt to satisfy these new needs explains why the psychologies turned to sciences such as physiology, physics, chemistry, and biology in order to draw from them concepts, models, and research methods.

Nevertheless, the initially refused metaphysical heritage reappears in two ways. First, in the way that psychology borrows scientific concepts (e.g., sensation from physiology; energy and balance from physics; adaptation from biology), and deprives them of their operational aspects to convert them into philosophical transcendental apt to explain all aspects of our lives. Second, the persistence of the mind and body problem, even in today’s cognitive sciences (the so-called hard problem). With the postulation of the “conservation of energy” principle in the beginning of the nineteenth century, it is impossible to think the relation between mind and body as only a bare relationship between two different substances. Besides the Cartesian interactionism, new solutions were reconsidered: parallelism (Leibniz), the materialistic solution (La Mettrie), idealism (Berkeley) and absolute monism (Spinoza). While parallelism was adopted by Wundt, Piaget and the Gestalt school from Berlin, the materialistic solution was absorbed by Watson’s behaviorism, and, curiously enough, absolute monism was repurposed by the avatar of the mathematical formalization of psychology, Gustav Fechner. We will try to demonstrate that this relation between formalization and absolute monism is not a historical accident, but rather a demand of Fechner’s thought. The formalization thus proposed is already the consequence of his philosophy: the mind and body problem expressed in his “daylight view.” How to articulate both aspects of Fechner’s thought?

HOW CAN WE TALK ABOUT AN AUTHOR?

“How can we talk about an author?” This is the question set by Michel Foucault (1992), reminding us that “author” is not a natural function of our common language, but historical and political operation to legitimate and give coherence to a particular group of discourses. Considering the history of a particular science, such as psychology, this author’s political function is augmented by another political operation: the one that categorizes and divides these discourses between the scientific and the non-scientific (idiosyncratic, metaphysical, and so on). This political operation presupposes that the
author’s function must be covered by the epistemological criterion of a well done and established science. This heroic and present-centered way to organize the author’s operation has the function to confer historical respectability upon psychology. But this is not the only way to organize the author’s function.

Another way to construct historical character, or author, can be based upon concepts of the current “Actor-Network Theory” of Bruno Latour and Michel Callon, and the “Epistemological Politics” of Isabelle Stengers and Vinciane Despret: recalcitrance and docility. If recalcitrance is the possibility to be open to new questions raised by the subjects in a research situation (something that is considered very rare in human sciences), docility is the simple acquiescence and obedience from the researched to research operations. This can be somewhat justified in empirical researches. Yet, how can this be applied in historical research? First of all, we have to deconstruct the monument constructed by the current epistemological function of the author, and put aside all the asymmetries between the legitimized and non-legitimized discourses (both metaphysical and personal). Then we can reconstruct Gustav Fechner’s author function in another political way, recognizing the recalcitrance of his questions and themes in his (and even our) times through the reformulation of the mind-body problem.

PSYCHOPHYSICS AND PANPSYCHISM

According to Jaeger (1987, p. 51), Fechner’s thought is the attempt of establishing compatibility between two kinds of thought: a calculating one and a philosophical one, in a blend of ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysical needs. In this thought not only matter and spirit are intended to be put together, but also science and faith, determinism and indeterminism. Jaeger also maintains that psychophysics is nothing but the empirical function of Fechner’s cosmovision, his “daylight view.” To support it, Jaeger quotes Fechner himself (in The Daylight View Opposed to the Night View):

> It was considered strange that the description of the Daylight View presented in the “Zend-Avesta” and the “Elements of Psychophysics” had the same author. They are two different things, and in the same author this would constitute a rift. But doesn’t anyone see that, when the two things are put together, they combine with one another? ... The Daylight View realizes itself as a natural philosophy. That is, regarding its theoretical side, it is in the beginning only the improvement and the conclusion on the topside of what, in the downside is elevated as Psychophysics. Or more, the Daylight View is the flower and the fruit of belief over the roots, which Psychophysics seeks in knowledge. (Fechner, as cited in Jaeger, 1987, pp. 49-51)

This relation between psychophysics and the daylight view is not clearly expressed in the Elements of Psychophysics, because: (1) if, on one hand, its goal is the establishment of a science that determines the functional relations between the physical and the psychological appearances, without any previous position regarding the relation of mind and body; (2) on the other hand, in the same section of the book, Fechner raises the possibility of a relation between body and mind where both would be a double aspect of the same entity (the monist hypothesis), refusing the interactionist, parallelist, and occasionalist points of view, since they maintain the substantial dualism. Let us go to the quotations in the introduction of Elements of Psychophysics (Fechner, 1966) that reinforce this presentation:
1) In what follows we shall base our inquiry only on the empirical relationships of body and mind, and in addition adopt for use the most common expressions for the designation of these facts, though they are expressed more in the terms of a dualistic approach than my own monistic one. Translation from one to the other is easy. (Fechner, 1966, p. 5)

2) This investigation does not propose to take a position in the controversy about the basic relation of body and mind, an issue which divides materialists and idealists. (Fechner, 1966, p. xxx)

3) Body and mind parallel each other; changes in one correspond to changes in the other. Why? Leibniz says: one can hold different opinions. Two clocks mounted on the same board adjust their movement to each other by means of their common attachment...; this is the usual dualistic notion of the mind-body relation. It could also be that someone moves the hands of both clocks so that they keep in harmony; this view is occasionalism, according to which God creates the mental changes appropriate to the bodily changes and vice versa in constant harmony. The clocks could also be adjusted so perfectly from the beginning that they keep perfect time, without ever needing adjustment; that is the notion of prestabilized harmony. Leibniz has left out one point of view—the most simple possible. They can keep time harmoniously—indeed never differ— because they are not really two different clocks. (Fechner, 1966, p. 4)

Despite the ambiguities present in *Elements of Psychophysics*, Fechner kept together the empiric work of psychophysics and the monist hypothesis, or his panpsychism. The occasional distance (in the first group of quotations) can be a strategy to have his inductive work accepted by the scientific community. But this ambiguity gave rise to the dismemberment of his heritage. For instance, Boring (1966, p. ix) puts that, if metaphysically Fechner is a monist, epistemologically he would be a dualist. This is so, as “Fechner’s psychophysics has played an important part in the history of psychophysical parallelism for the reason that mind and body, sensation and stimulus, have to be regarded as separate entities in order that each can be measured and the relation between the two determined” (Boring, 1950, p. 286). If psychophysics was used in a very different sense and even against its original intentions due to its ambiguities, it is high time we demolished this monument raised by a triumphalist version of the history of psychology and restored the Fechner’s questions and themes.

**THE DAYLIGHT VIEW**

How can such a “thick thought” (in James’s words) be exposed? Some evidences can be found in his writings (signed and pen-named, published and personal), and at the same time in commentaries such as can be found in James (1977) and Külpe (1946). Fechner’s *daylight view* is composed of:

1) Absolute monism, expressing the idea of a single substance with two aspects, the spiritual and the physical. This assumption is exposed in his *Elements of Psychophysics* (Fechner, 1966). For example, when standing inside a circle, its convex side is hidden, covered by the concave side; conversely, when outside, the concave side is covered by the convex. Both sides belong together as indivisibly as do the mental and the material sides of man and can be looked upon as analogous to his inner and outer side. It is just impossible, standing in the plane of the circle, to see both sides of the circle simultaneously as it is to see both sides of man from the
plane of human existence. Only when we change our standpoint is the side of the circle we view changed, so that we now see the hidden side behind the one we had seen before.

2) Absolute monism is completed by the *daylight view*, a kind of panpsychist hypothesis, insofar as not only man, but “the whole universe in its different spans and wave-lights, exclusions and envelopments, is everywhere alive and conscious” (James, 1977, p. 535). Here the matter would be only the phenomenical side of the spirit, which permits its expression to the others. In opposition to the *daylight view* reigns the materialism of the *night view*, which “treat whatever lies outside our life as so much slag and ashes of life only; or if we believe in Divine Spirit, we fancy him on the one side as bodiless, and nature as soulless in the other” (James, 1977, p. 535). This concept is present in *The Daylight View Opposed to the Night View*.

3) As long as all beings have soul and life, there would exist a hierarchy of souls, from the soul of the plants (which would be totally aware of their lower functions, like breathing and absorption) to the souls of the planets, that would be like guardian angels: “So, if heavens really are the home of the angels, the heavenly bodies must be those very angels, for other creatures *there* are none” (James, 1977, p. 540). These angels, as the earth, would be superior to the other souls, for they are more independent and complex than its own inhabitants, besides being able to absorb and contain the inferior souls: “As our mind is not the bare sum of our sights plus our sounds plus our pains, but in adding these terms together also finds relations among them and weaves into schemes and forms and objects of which no one sense in it separates estate knows anything, so the earth-soul traces relations between the contents of my mind and the content of yours of which neither of our separate mind is conscious” (James, 1977, p. 542). These ideas can be found in *Nanna, or the Soul Life of Plants and Concerning Souls*.

4) This hierarchy of souls ends up in a pantheism, in which God is seen as a *Soul of the World*, to which all the souls flow: “[the] whole system, along with whatever else may be, is the body of that absolutely totalized consciousness of the universe to which men give the name of God” (James, 1977, p. 536). According to Külpé (1946, pp. 293-294), it would be better to represent this hypothesis as panentheism, because as it considers God a superior conscience, this wouldn’t be identified with the world, being something larger. This viewpoint is found in *The Daylight View Opposed to the Night View*.

5) This panentheist hierarchy of the souls leads, on the other hand, to the concept of the immortality of souls, since the souls would merge with the superior souls after death. It is in this sense that Fechner imagines the integration of our souls into the earth-soul, a process similar to the dissolution of a sensation in our conscience, without it (the sensation) losing its individuality: “When one of us dies, it is as if an eye of the world were closed, for all perceptive contributions from that particular quarter cease. But the memories and conceptual relations that have spun themselves round the perceptions of that person remain in the larger earth-life as distinct as ever, and form new relations and grow and develop throughout all the future, in the same way in which our distinct objects of thought, once stored in memory, form new relations and develop throughout our whole finite life” (James, 1977, p. 543). This a hypothesis present in *The Little Book of Life After Death*.

6) This view of the immortality of the soul explains also Fechner’s interest in psychic phenomena (common in the official psychology of the end of nineteenth and the
beginning of the 20th century), urging him to attend sçances (according to entries in his “Spiritist Diary,” not published, but partially exposed in Bringmann, Bringmann, & Medway, 1987). These sçances, organized by the North-American medium Henry Slade, carry Fechner from the “ambivalent skepticism to a guarded endorsement” (Bringmann, Bringmann, & Medway, 1987, p. 252), guiding him to find in The Daylight View Opposed to the Night View a space for spiritualism somewhat similar to the spaces usually given to the pathology and the psychology of the abnormal: “Physiology can learn from pathology, psychology can profit from abnormal psychology ... Similarly, we can learn about life on earth and the beyond from spiritualism” (Fechner, as cited in Bringmann, Bringmann, & Medway, 1987, p. 253). If the hypothesis about a living and sensible nature can have its empirical basis in psychophysics, then the thesis of the immortality of the soul could have its evidence in spiritualism.

7) This daylight view, thick, monist, and panpsychist, has as its basis the methods of induction and analogy. These methods were criticized by Wundt, considering the limitations of the first and the excesses of the second. For Wundt, Fechner’s use of these methods represents an inversion and deviation from their common functions in normal scientific proceedings (Lowrie, 1946, pp. 76-78). For James (1977, p. 536), such analogies are precious because they point to the similarities and the differences between the compared terms. Right or wrong, such proceedings lead to an empirical religion (James, 1977) and to an inductive metaphysics (Külpe, 1946), breaking the frontier between knowledge and faith. This is the point where psychophysics can be seen as the inductive root of which the daylight view is the flower and the fruit.

THE DAYLIGHT VIEW AND SPINOZIAN MONISM

According to Bernard (1972), in the Zend-Avesta (1854) Fechner highlights some of the differences between his and Spinoza’s position concerning the question of the causal relationship between the mental and the physical. Nevertheless, at the essential level of the mind and body question, Fechner clearly exposes his affinity with Spinoza’s point of view:

From a certain aspect our view appears to be quite Spinozistic, nay, may appear to be pure Spinozism. Spinoza’s view permits, as does ours, the double, materialistic and mentalistic, conception of the realm of existence by conceiving the One identical, essential being (the substance) now as bodily (under the attribute of extension) and again as mental (under the attribute of thought). In all this we fully agree with Spinoza. (Fechner, 1854, p. 155, translated by and cited in Bernard, 1972, p. 213)

It is also possible to study the Spinozian influence on Fechner through Schelling and other romantic philosophers. Nevertheless, our aim is to create more than a history of ideas. We intend to establish a strategic link between these two works. In this case, in Spinozian philosophy we can point out a certain affinity with absolute monism (the first Fechnerian thesis) and pantheism (his fifth thesis).

“God, or Nature”: The most classic of Spinoza’s theses (as demonstrated by the Propositions I to XIX, Book I, Spinoza, 2012) puts into question the theistic views that claim a transcendent and independent or external position of God in regard to his creation (Appendix, Book I, Spinoza, 2012). Despite his denial of all creation ex nihilo, the accusation of Spinoza’s pantheism is based on his identification of God, Nature and
the *Infinite Substance*, constructing his ontology on its activity as *Being and Cause* through his infinite potency of self-production or production of everything. On the other side, Spinoza was considered a heretic and atheist because of his concept of God not being a transcendent entity, above and beyond Nature. On the contrary, the author defended the immanence of a unique infinite substance pervading all of Nature. On his major work, the *Ethics*, he writes: “Except God, no substance can be or be conceived” (Proposition XIV, Book I, Spinoza, 2012), and furthermore: “Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God” (Proposition XV, Book I, Spinoza, 2012).

God or Nature is constituted by infinite attributes, two of them known by the human intellect: extension and thought. Clearly against Cartesian substantial dualism, his writings expose extension and thought as two infinite essential expressions of this unique substance. Men are also a dual finite expression of this unique substance: the human mind is a finite modification of the attribute thought, such as the human body is a finite modification of attribute extension, both realizing themselves in just one singular human existence. How are body and mind related in Spinozas’s philosophy? Differing to a great extent from Cartesian interactionism, in the *Ethics* he pursues a geometrical demonstration to propose that “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things” (Proposition VII, Book II, Spinoza, 2012). Body and mind are essentially the same, figuring as different expressions of two distinct attributes: “In just the same way as thoughts and ideas of things are ordered and connected in the mind, so the affections of the body, or images of things are ordered and connected in the body” (Proposition I, Book V, Spinoza, 2012).

Recognizing these resonances of Spinoza’s thought on Fechner’s first and fifth theses, there are, however, a number of local and strategic differences. With respect to the first ones, even if Spinoza defends that everything has “anima,” his definition differs from what Fechner is calls soul, this last one being closer Spinoza’s defines of *mens* or mind which is a particularity of human existence. Whereas in Spinoza’s works we find levels or degrees of soul complexity, they cannot be seen as a hierarchy of souls, but rather as non-hierarchical distinctions based on the perfection of all existent beings. It is also possible to point out methodological differences: while Spinoza works with a more geometrical deductive method, Fechner works mostly with induction and analogies (as shown by Wundt).

However, the differences increases when we consider the strategic aspects of each thought. James (1977), for example, points out the context in which Fechner develops his *daylight view*: an antidote to a personal crisis he experienced between 1839 and 1843. While these *daylight view* effects lead Fechner to a fight against materialism, trying to articulate faith and knowledge, Spinoza has different objectives: his fight was against superstition and theological thought. In this sense, he meant to create a new theory of knowledge by articulating ideas, affects, desires and the body’s affections, which were not purged from traces of faith and religion. Spinoza recognizes these last ones as the lowest and most powerless type of knowledge, classifying them as imaginary fields where there is no room for philosophical development. To put it shortly: besides faith and religion there is nothing but the action of theological and political forces that act to control the masses by fear and ignorance. This process led him to a reform in ethics and politics, without any theological basis. Thus it is possible to find in Spinoza a few references to a peculiar and polemic eternal part of the mind, but this concept is far removed from that of the soul’s immortality or the process of
dissolution in the earth’s soul or in God: “The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal” (Proposition XXIII, Book V, Spinoza, 2012). In the same way, it is possible to find in Fechner a pleasure theory, a principle which explains the soul’s development. But this principle does not have the same strength and relevance as happiness and sadness as the fundamental affects, according to Spinoza.

**CONCLUSION**

Despite the differences between Fechner and Spinoza, we cannot ignore their common proposition of a special monist thought that claims that all nature is interwoven by the connection of the physical and the spiritual, without any rupture. It is just in this singular position about the relation between mind and body that lays Fechner’s psychophysics, as well as William James’s radical empiricism, John Dewey’s functional psychology, Donald Winnicott’s clinical work, Francisco Varela’s neurophenomenology, and Vinciane Despret’s non-deterministic psychology. And many other possible theories that open a third path across the modern separation between man and nature, materiality and mind, and their much eroded dualistic corollaries: humanist and idealistic efforts on the one hand, and materialistic and naturalistic efforts on the other hand. And it is precisely from this night view and its dogmatic sleep that Fechner wants to awaken us (in Spinoza’s words, “they sleep with their eyes open”). But in psychology, the only accepted dream is the Kantian dream, which strives to awaken us from the metaphysical dream with the universality of “scientific laws” (such as the psychophysical one). A Kantian dream that forecloses crucial questions (such as those regarding the mind and body), and other possible dreams; a dream that can validate the dominant night view of today’s neurosciences and its nightmares of reason.

**REFERENCES**


Chapter 30

Dilthey’s dream:
Psycho-philosophical reflection through the work of art

Melinda Pinfeld
University of Alberta, Canada

SUMMARY

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) was a German philosopher who viewed as inherently problematic the application of the methods of the natural sciences to understanding the Geisteswissenschaften, or human studies. Among the fields within Dilthey’s “human studies” were history, philosophy, religion, psychology, art, literature, and aesthetics. Dilthey viewed imagination and creativity as phenomena that could be examined methodically and rationally through human expression in works of art. For Dilthey, his epiphanic locus became an impactful dream that he experienced in 1893, with Raphael’s School of Athens as its symposium piece. For over a decade, Dilthey re-analyzed this dream and its revelatory relationship with his life’s work. This paper examines Dilthey’s uncharacteristic reliance on a work of visual art as he renewed his interest in hermeneutics.

DILTHEY’S BERLIN LECTURE 1903

At a celebration honoring him on his seventieth birthday (November 19, 1903) the German philosopher, Wilhelm Dilthey delivered a lecture in Berlin to friends, colleagues and students. A transcript of this birthday speech, based upon Dilthey’s notes for it, was published on November 22, 1903 in the Berlin newspaper, Tägliche Rundschau (Daily Review) (Makkreel & Rodi, 1996). In this encomium, Dilthey reminisced about his years in Berlin during his student days, and as a professor at Berlin University. Notably, Dilthey took care to use the core language and the precisely specialized vocabulary of his life’s work and philosophy, even as he ceded the ultimate credit for his own accomplishments to his country and countrymen.

Dilthey spoke about the many great German thinkers who had most influenced his philosophy. The list of intellectual luminaries honored by Dilthey, as he himself was being honored, included Wilhelm von Humboldt, Georg Hegel, F.D.E. Schleiermacher, and Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm. Dilthey acknowledged also his professors and friends, especially Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg (1802-1872), the philologist and philosopher who, Dilthey said, had exercised the greatest influence on him.

Dilthey lauded, also, the contributions of Philipp August Boeckh (1785-1867), the classical scholar and antiquarian who revolutionized philology by reconceiving it as both historical and philosophical. Schleiermacher had been Boeckh’s mentor, and it was Schleiermacher who steered Boeckh’s readings to Plato, whom Boeckh read intensively. Boeckh’s writings, in turn, offered ideas that clearly impacted Dilthey’s own, such as the claim that “Philology and philosophy are reciprocally conditioned: without general knowledge one cannot come to know what is known, nor can one arrive at knowledge without first knowing what others have known” (Boeckh, 1968, p. 15);
and, “for in art as a whole as in public and private life, ideas are expressed which have directly or indirectly influenced the development of knowledge” (p. 166).

Dilthey closed his birthday comments with a summary statement of his lifelong aim: “I undertook to examine the nature and condition of historical consciousness, a critique of historical reason” (Makkreel & Rodi, 1996, p. 389). With this statement, Dilthey referred to his first major publication Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften (Introduction to the Human Sciences) (1883). “In his dedication [of this book, when it was first published] to Paul Yorck, Dilthey referred to ‘one of our first conversations’ in which ‘I still dared to call this book a ‘Critique of Historical Reason’” (Makkreel & Rodi, 1989, p. 47, n. 1). Thus, in a brief but revealing speech, the normally enigmatic philosopher managed to invoke all of his mentors as forebears in the service of elucidating the formation of his own philosophy; further, he made reference to the Einleitung as a “critique of historical reason”; and, for those students and colleagues who knew his work intimately, this was a lightly veiled homage to his deceased friend and colleague, Paul Yorck.

**Dilthey’s dream**

In preparation for his birthday speech, Dilthey sketched out his notes of a dream that he had had about decade before, around 1893. Within the literature, there are a number of varied opinions expressed about the nature of Dilthey’s dream. The notes are fragmentary, according to Hodges (1952), who reported on two accounts of the dream episode—the dream itself, and the conversation about the dream that Dilthey reported from the following day. Kluback (1956) reproduced the dream text, including the introductory remarks that Dilthey planned to make publicly. Plantinga (1980) referred to the dream notes as “the content of a dream [Dilthey] claims to have had years before” (p. 3). Hirsch (1976) referred to the dream as a “nightmare” that “visited the philosopher sometime after he had begun to use the term Weltanschauung” [variously, “world view,” “approach,” and “spiritual perspective of a person or a culture,” implying “methodological perspectivism”] (Hirsch, 1976). Owusu (1989) followed Hirsch, and referred to the dream as a nightmare. Jucovy (1964), in a review of a work by Bertram D. Lewin, M.D., referred to Dilthey’s dream as a “so-called dream.” Blanco and Rosa (1997), speculating that Dilthey “chose to tell (or invent) a dream” (p. 191) reported that Dilthey had delivered the lecture about the dream at a symposium celebrating his seventieth anniversary.

The fragmentary accounts of the dream and the conversation that Dilthey and his friends had about it survive in notes and drafts, handwritten by Dilthey (Hodges, 1952). Dilthey’s dream seems to have been written by the philosopher as a summa of his life’s work. Certainly, revised drafts of Dilthey’s account of the dream were composed at the time of his seventieth birthday. In discussing the dream, as Dilthey gave it, I will attempt to honor one of Dilthey’s main strictures: “that a thinker be treated on his own terms” (Ermarth, 1978, p. 7).

**Art as expression**

Dilthey rarely referred to specific examples of visual art in his writings, although he did discuss visual artists now and again, mentioning among others Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Gustave Moreau, Donatello, Verocchio, Masaccio, and Albrecht
Dürer. In the uncharacteristic analysis of a visual image—Raphael’s *School of Athens*—as filtered through his dream, Dilthey admitted an audience into his otherwise guarded personal world. Dilthey worked systematically through a hermeneutical method of experience in concert with *his* experience of this work of visual art. He had worked similarly through the literary works of Goethe, Heraclitus, and Shakespeare, among others. Dilthey never argued for mere causality—art did not cause the response; rather, he worked through the *art* to a qualitatively colored articulation of his own *Erlebnis*. He was, on paper, thinking through the *unfolding of experience*, which he saw as fundamental.

Dilthey held that the object of human studies is not external, or sensory, as in the natural sciences, but “first and foremost an inner reality,” a coherence experienced from within (Ermarth, 1978, p. 229). We become aware of ourselves as individuals only through the apprehension of ourselves as different from others. The information to support this individuality through others is external, sensory, and must be “translated.” Dilthey’s question became “How can one quite individually structured consciousness bring an alien individuality of a completely different type to objective knowledge through such reconstruction?” (p. 231). The answer for Dilthey was *understanding* (*Verstehen*), which he defined as the “process by which an inside is conferred on a complex of external sensory signs … that process by which we intuit, behind the signs given to our senses, that psychic reality of which it is the expression” (p. 232).

Dilthey argued that this kind project is very different from that of understanding in the natural sciences. *Verstehen* may be approached only in a holistic manner. Dilthey argued that the best candidates for objective and systematic understanding are permanent expressions or *objectifications* of life, “those residues of human reality preserved in human form,” such as literature or texts. By way of this argument, Dilthey left open the door for interpretive work with other permanent expressions of life, such as architecture, sculpture, or paintings.

Can the understanding of individual existence be raised from a presupposition of objective validity, to one of general validity? Initially, Dilthey believed that this was possible, and claimed that understanding and interpretation were the preliminary operations that formed the basis for this essential task, and that these preliminary operations were thus the basis of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. He held that the “systematically organized human studies” were then “able to go on and derive more general laws” (p. 230).

By 1910, Dilthey used the term *expressions of life* in an expanded sense, to include both responses to social-cultural situations, and the reflections of the mind of the expresser (Zaner & Heiges, 1977, p. 13). Accordingly, by this date, Dilthey seems to have reconsidered the relation between “expressions of life” and “expressions of lived experience.” Ermarth (1978) described Dilthey’s three classes of expressions, and the criterion of understanding pertaining to each: “(1) scientific and theoretical judgments; (2) practical actions; and (3) expressions of lived experience (*Erlebnisausdrücke*) in a direct and specific sense” (p. 272). Zaner and Heiges (1977) observed that these classes of expression are arranged hierarchically, but not in order of importance; rather, to the degree in which each disclosed about the others (p. 14). Dilthey addressed all three classes and treated them as somewhat interconnected, as hanging together. However, it was Dilthey’s third class that most directly concerned a discussion of the arts.

*Expressions of lived experience* are fundamentally different, according to Dilthey, and their interpretation requires care, for they are “direct manifestations of inner mental
life” (Ermarth, 1978, p. 273). An expression of lived experience “raises life out of the depths which are unilluminated by consciousness” (Dilthey, 1910, p. 124). In this class are gestures, exclamations, unconscious responses, and works of art. These expressions can be well thought out, as in the work of art, or they may be involuntary or spontaneous. Truth claims do not apply in this class of expressions. Expressions are neither true, nor false, but rather “of truthfulness and untruthfulness” (p. 124). Expressions are, then, about authenticity. Working with these expressions through to understanding requires skilled exegesis.

Art as experience

When we experience works of art we understand them through the contexts of our own lived experiences, our psychic nexus/continua. The psyche hooks into the ways it has experienced something similar. Dilthey referred to this as “the projection of one’s self into the work,” and, even more explicitly, as “the transferring of one’s own self into a given set of expressions of life” (p. 132). A “given set of expression of life” might be a work of literature, a painting or other visual work of art, architecture, or a sculpture. Implicit in this process of “transferring” one’s self into the expression is that of the historical, in the looking back, and the present—but the future is also implicated. We find ourselves, carried along in the work of art. We become, along with the artist, a participant in the creative act. We accomplish this naturally through what Dilthey referred to as re-creation (Nachbilden) or re-experiencing (Nacherleben). Re-experiencing and re-creating are, for Dilthey, the “highest form in which the totality of life is effective in the understanding” (p. 132) [including the work of art, its expression, and ourselves]. “Expressions of lived experience,” Dilthey said, “Always contain more than is contained in the consciousness of the poet or the artist, and thus they evoke more” (p. 132).

Dilthey claimed that re-experiencing is crucial in our appropriation of the world. The process of re-experiencing occurs within some milieu (art, literature, drama, music), coupled with the representation of an external situation. Under these conditions, our imaginative projection or transposition into the representation stimulates re-experience, and we effectively recreate an “alien life,” an “alien psychic life,” and experience it (to the fullness of our imaginative capabilities). Such experiences are crucial for spiritual growth, Dilthey argued, and they are the only means that we have to break away from the life course otherwise set out for us by Wesen (nature), to Dasein (personal being).

“Understanding,” Dilthey said, “opens up [for man] … a broad realm of possibilities which are not available within the determination of his actual life” (p. 134). Therefore, we re-determine ourselves from within, and the fixed expressions of life, especially in the arts, stimulate this coming-to-self.

Although he had made earlier arguments for literary expressions of life precisely because of the fixed nature of text as the proper focus for hermeneutics (the theory of interpretation), Dilthey also left open the possibility for an “art of exegesis whose objects are statues or paintings…” (Makkreel, 1975, p. 258). Works of art, or text-analogues (Taylor, 1985b, p. 15) are, like verbal texts, human expressions that have been fixed. Visual art, as one of the “expressions of life” is, then, most congenial with Dilthey’s conditions for the complementary acts of self-reflection and expression. For Dilthey, reflection always coexists in relation to expressions of experience, such as those of art or literature. Later, and after Dilthey, Ricoeur (1974) defined reflection in
terms of appropriation—thus deepening Dilthey’s concept of Aneignung, or the making of one’s own that which was initially alien to him—stating that “Reflection is the appropriation of our effort to exist and our desire to be by means of the works which testify to this effort and desire” (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 17, emphasis added). Ricoeur (1974) summarized Dilthey’s position thus: “Reflection is blind intuition if it is not mediated by what Dilthey called the expressions in which life objectifies itself” (p. 17).

The dream

For Dilthey, the locus of his understanding became the vivid and ultimately epiphanic dream that he experienced in about 1893, with Raphael’s famous fresco, the School of Athens (1510-11), as its symposium piece. Around the midpoint between his renewed interest in hermeneutics in 1900 and his systematic outline of this theory in circa 1910, Dilthey analyzed his dream in an attempt to understand its meaning in its relation with his life’s work and his construal of self.

Sometime in 1893, as was his custom, Dilthey visited his dear friend and colleague, Paul Yorck, in Silesia. Dilthey’s account of the dream, as he sketched it later in 1903, is a recollection of the dream and the events around it. After a long day, and the evening spent discussing philosophy “deep into the night” (Kluback, 1956, p. 103), Dilthey retired to the guest room, “the old familiar bedroom” (p. 103). Hanging over the bed was a “fine etching” by Giovanni Volpato (c.1735-1803) of Raphael’s fresco, the so-called School of Athens. In his dream notes, Dilthey recounted his feelings about Raphael’s composition:

It was gratifying to visualize how the harmonious spirit of the divine Raphael blended the life and death struggle of hostile philosophical systems into a peaceful discourse. About these gentle, related figures there hovered an atmosphere of peace, which for the first time at the dawn of ancient culture, strove to harmonize powerfully conflicting thoughts. In the noblest intellects of the Renaissance, the same atmosphere was present.

Tired, I fell asleep. Instantly an alert dream life possessed me. I dreamed of Raphael’s picture and of our conversation. In my dream, the figures of the philosophers came to life… (Kluback, 1956, pp. 105-6).

Dilthey described in detail how, in the dream, he saw the philosophers in Raphael’s composition come to life. As each philosopher turned his face toward Dilthey, Dilthey strained recognize him. Some—Bruno, Descartes, Leibniz, “and so many others”—Dilthey recognized from portraits of them that he had seen. From Dilthey’s description of “left” and “right”, the dreamer seemed to be located outside the pictorial space, and looking in at the scene from outside of it, as though he were looking through a window. “Then,” Dilthey continued, “something happened which I did not expect even in a dream. As if driven by inner necessity, they [the philosophers] hastened toward each other to assemble themselves in groups” (p.104). As Dilthey continued his account of the dream, he described, without naming, other figures

restlessly moving about. These people wished to mediate: between positivism with its thorough rejection of life’s enigma and all metaphysics, but also between all comprehensive determinism, and those who believed in freedom of the individual. But in vain the mediators hastened to and from among the groups. The distance between the groups increased with each moment … A strange anxiety came over me … The unity of my being was torn asunder for I was
deeply attracted at times to one group and at other times to the second or even to the third. I strove for the unity of thought, and in this struggle, the cover of sleep became thinner and lighter, the figures of my dream faded away. And I awoke (Kluback, 1956, p. 106).

Dilthey had maintained an enduring interest in dreams and dreaming in the contexts of creativity and imagination, and he wrote about these aspects of these phenomena as early as 1887, in *The Imagination of the Poet: Elements for A Poetics*. In this work, Dilthey sought to distinguish the imaginative experiences of the poet from other states, such as sleeping or insanity. Dilthey regarded the “dream as ‘the oldest of all the poets’.” Dilthey believed that “The imagination … builds a ‘second world’ … a universal world and to some degree, it is given to everyone [but more so to the poet or artist]. Thus, the world of the imagination creates and reveals itself involuntarily in the dream…” (Barasch, 1997, p. 118).

**Raphael’s School of Athens**

Dilthey was explicit in his remarks about the Raphael identifying it as the visual and metaphorical link to his dream. Although Dilthey may have been well familiar with the fresco at the Vatican, as he was a frequent guest of Paul Yorck’s castle, he probably came to know the Volpato engraving so well that he incorporated Raphael’s complex composition into his thoughts through it. However, it is likely that Dilthey was familiar with contemporary scholarship about the *School of Athens*, especially through Hermann Grimm’s discussion of it in *Das Leben Raphael*, published in the first edition in 1872, later revised and expanded throughout the 1880s, and translated into English in 1888. Grimm had accepted the position of Chair (History of Art) at Berlin University in 1872. He was, therefore, a colleague of Wilhelm Dilthey’s at Berlin. Grimm published *Goethe* in 1876, and it was in direct response to Grimm’s biography that Dilthey wrote one of his own essays on the German poet.

In *The Life of Raphael* (1888), Grimm identified the two central figures in Raphael’s composition as the Evangelist Paul, on the fresco’s right, and “by the side of Paul, as representative of Greek Philosophy, stands an old man pointing heavenward, who has been variously identified” (p. 102). Grimm gave much attention to what he determined was Raphael’s depiction, not of Aristotle, but of the Evangelist Paul:

The principal figure is Paul. As he stretches his hand toward us he seems to command silence. He stands before us in youthful vigor. The representation of Paul was one of the tasks present to Raphael’s imagination throughout his entire life. (Grimm, 1888, p. 103)

Another of Dilthey’s colleagues at Berlin for a time was the eminent art historian, Heinrich Wölfflin. Wölfflin, who was one of Dilthey’s former students, filled the position of Chair (History of Art) at Berlin after Grimm died in 1901. It is certain that Dilthey would have read Wölfflin’s *Die klassische Kunst (Classic Art)* (1898). Raphael’s artistic program for the frescoes in the *Stanza della Segnatura* was extremely complex, and remains a matter of much scholarly debate and little agreement (Gombrich, 1996/1972; Gombrich & Eribon, 1993). Speculation continues to date, with respect to some of the identities of the philosophical personages that Raphael included in the *School of Athens*. The problem of identification of the philosophers and thinkers in the *School of Athens* is compounded by the fact that some of the figures, whose features were canonically depicted in other art works—such as sculptures—are more
easily identified; the identification of others for whom there was no available extant artistic model for Raphael to use as a reference are more problematic. Thus, Raphael undoubtedly used contemporary figures as surrogates for some of the ancients.

Two figures are situated at the central vanishing point under the arch. They are identified, commonly, as Plato (to the left of center) and Aristotle, his student (to the right). The literature speculating about this philosophical coupling is exhaustive, so I will restrict the description to Wölflin’s version. First, Wölflin briefly situated the depiction of this dispute in the history of other such depictions in art. Then, Wölflin offered his understanding of the central scene:

The two Princes of Philosophy stand side by side in noble calm; the one with arm outstretched, whose hand, palm down, makes a sweeping gesture over the earth is Aristotle, the ‘constructive’ man; the other, Plato, with uplifted finger, points heavenwards. We do not know what inspired Raphael to characterise the opposite qualities of the two personalities in this way, which makes them plausible as images of the two philosophers. (Wölflin, 1898, p. 94)

Metaphors of movement

A closer look at the two philosophers reveals that Plato is holding a volume of his *Timaeus*, and Aristotle is holding his volume, *Ethics*. A broadly construed synopsis of the significance of these symbols interprets the *Timaeus* as a scientific treatise on universals and ideals (Blackburn, 1996, p. 289) and the *Ethics* as a treatise on the natural history of human beings (Blackburn, 1996, p. 25) and thus based upon experience and understood empirically. We can understand the gestures of each philosopher in terms of this distinction. We might also interpret the gestures as perpendiculars: for Plato, the vertical; and, for Aristotle, the horizontal. As perpendiculars, they intersect and temper each other. But, further, we might consider the formal properties of the gestures, and the way in which each describes: Plato, *up* into the coffered vault of the space and heavenward; and, Aristotle, *across and through* the pictorial space, into the world and penetrating the viewer’s domain. The physical primacy of Aristotle is enlivened, moving slightly forward of Plato’s more staid position, towards the presumed viewer, and into the world.

Dilthey’s identification with the philosophical stance of Aristotle

Dilthey recognized his own philosophical stance within Raphael’s image; that is, that there are two different approaches required: that of natural science and that of human science. As he related Aristotle more with his own philosophical position than he did Plato, Dilthey’s engagement with the *School of Athens* becomes more significant. As early as 1861—notable before his shift from theology to philosophy—Dilthey distinguished between two great “systems of thought”: (1) “the system of laws” (or simply “science”) which has “unconditional validity,” as distinct from (2) the “system of value-laden and meaningful existence” (also “world-view”), which is not unconditional but at the same time not simply personal... This formulation conformed closely to the traditional separation of “physics” and “ethics” found in Aristotle and Schleiermacher... (Ermarth, 1978, pp. 94-95).

Aristotle’s thought was never very far from Dilthey’s own. He began his own *Poetics* (1887), for example, with an extensive discussion of Aristotle’s *Poetics* and its
relationship to contemporary German aesthetics. Thus, Dilthey may have found within Raphael’s School of Athens an apt visual metaphor for his own philosophical apprehensions and anxieties, but he would have found fuller expression in a knowledge of the entire artistic program in which the School of Athens was but one inhabitant.

Dilthey’s anxiety, as revealed in the dream, arose from his recognition that “philosophy seemed to exist in three or possibly more different forms—the unity of my being seemed to be rent, as I was longingly drawn now to this group, now to that, and I struggled to retain it” (Hodges, 1952, p. 312). But, the dream had an epiphanic effect on the philosopher. In other accounts of the dream, Dilthey continued his reflections upon its meaning in terms of the future of philosophy. He reported that his initial reflections took place just after the dream, as he lay in bed, in what presents as that of a liminal hypnagogic state, which Dilthey described as one “between dream and dream” (Kluback, 1956, p. 108).

Dilthey observed that historically philosophers, theologians, and poets were related. What distinguished philosophers from the others was their desire to solve “life’s enigma by a universally valid knowledge” (Kluback, 1956, p. 107). Dilthey concluded that universally valid knowledge did not exist. In the Kluback version of the dream, Dilthey more directly described the passage that philosophy must make: “The natural sciences have transformed the outer world. In the great world epoch now evolving, the social sciences are winning an ever-increasing influence” (Kluback, 1956, p. 107).

In another of Dilthey’s fragmentary passages about the dream (Hodges, 1952), Dilthey recorded a conversation—among Dilthey, Paul Yorck, a neurologist, and a painter—that occurred in Silesia the day following the epiphanic dream. From Dilthey’s account, the participants in the conversation that evening were representative of various Weltanschauungen (world-views): the philosopher (Dilthey); the poet (the painter); the man of science (the neurologist); and the man of religion (Yorck).

About a decade elapsed between Dilthey’s dream and the more polished account of 1903. On Dilthey’s own terms, it does not matter whether or not he, in fact, dreamt this dream. And, if he did dream it, then it matters not at all about the ‘veracity’ of the accounts of it that he offered. For Dilthey, “the imagination is inseparable from the whole psychic nexus. Every communication which occurs in human daily life automatically transforms lived experience; wishes, fears, and dreams of the future transcend reality; every action is determined by an image of something that does not yet exist…” (Makkreel & Rodi, 1985, p. 242).

Dilthey’s “second world” was one distinct from practical activity—it was the world of the imagination: “This mode of imagination expresses itself spontaneously in the production of the dream—the most ancient of all poetry” (Makkreel & Rodi, 1985, p. 242). Imagination, although it is different in kind from day-to-day activity, is experienced. Imagination is part of our psychic system; at once, and however expressed, it becomes part of our personal history. Imagination shapes each of us, and we each shape imagination through the experience of it. Dilthey believed that “The religious thinker, the artist, and the philosopher create on the basis of lived experience” (Makkreel & Rodi, 1985, p. 225, emphasis added).

CONCLUSIONS

Within Dilthey’s accounts of his dream, and scattered throughout his writings from 1896-1910, we catch glimpses of the man within the philosopher-psychologist, who
believed that “The relationship between feeling and image, between meaning and appearance, does not originate either in the taste of the listener or the imagination of the artist. Rather, it emerges in the life of the human mind…” (Dilthey, 1985/1887, p. 121).

From Dilthey’s dream accounts and within his writings on imagination, it is clear that for him the life of the human mind (effectively, its psychology) emerged not only through experiences in the waking state, but—and, perhaps more importantly—in other experiential states, such as dreaming. Dilthey’s published work on dreaming (1887-1893) was coincident with Freud’s more well-known writings, and, indeed, may have predated them.

REFERENCES


Knowledge and dreams, Bertram D. Lewin, M.D. The Psychoanalytic Quarterly, 33, 148-151.


Chapter 31

Culture and mind in reconstruction:
Bartlett’s analogy between individual and group processes

Brady Wagoner
Aalborg University, Denmark

SUMMARY

Frederic Bartlett is widely recognized for his insight that remembering is (re)constructive, rather than reproductive. However, there is much misunderstanding about what precisely he meant by this. Many cognitive psychologists, for example, now assume that reconstruction means “distorted” or “inaccurate” memory. This paper aims to clarify the concept of reconstruction through an analysis of how Bartlett uses it to describe individual and group processes. It will be argued that for Bartlett “schemata” are to the individual as “cultural patterns” are to the social group. After briefly describing what schemata and cultural patterns are, five points of comparison will be made: (1) readiness to receive, (2) dominance of the past over the present, (3) stability through plasticity, (4) radical reconstruction, and (5) de- and re-contextualization. The paper will conclude by suggesting that the similarities between individual and group processes go beyond analogy, by highlighting how the two levels are interdependent.

INTRODUCTION: SCHEMATA AND CULTURAL PATTERNS

A central idea of Bartlett’s approach is that culture (e.g., stories, ideas, designs, ceremonies, scientific theories) is continuously reconstructed (rather than simply reproduced) in action and communication. Bartlett’s early experiments aptly demonstrated this process by highlighting, for example, how images and stories are transformed when they are repeatedly or serially reproduced outside their culture of origin. He theorized this process of transformation at both individual and group levels. At the group level, Bartlett (1923) refers to “cultural patterns” as group norms, which regulate the behavior of the group’s members. He borrows heavily from his anthropological mentor W.H.R. Rivers (1914), who had argued that the most important factor in social change was cultural contact between groups. When groups come into contact they exchange cultural elements, which in turn are transformed in the direction of the “cultural patterns” of the recipient group, a process named “conventionalization” (Rivers, 1912). At the individual level, Bartlett (1932) developed the concept of schema, from the neurologist Henry Head (1920), to articulate the way in which the accumulated past operates en masse in the present. Any new action or experience always occurs against the background of an organized mass of previous experience (i.e., schemata). Bartlett (1932) says schemata operate at the intersection between an organism and its environment and are “actively doing something all the time” (p. 201). Thus, his concept of schema is incompatible with cognitive psychologist’s understanding of it as a static knowledge structure in the head which functions to store experiences. Parallels between Bartlett’s theorizing of individual and group processes
are apparent even in the unstable terminology he uses to refer to them: one of Bartlett’s (1932) preferred names for schemata was “active developing patterns,” whereas he later discusses “cultural patterns” using the phrase “group schemata.” In what follows I will outline five conceptual parallels between the two levels in Bartlett’s work.

**COMPARISON 1: READINESS TO RECEIVE**

A person is not equally ready to receive all impressions. What is experienced of the world is a function of the person’s attitude, interests, personal history and group membership. These factors constitute a person’s active orientation to the world, aspects of which change from moment to moment, while others endure through ones lifetime. The role that a transitory attitude plays in shaping experience can easily be demonstrated with a simple experiment: briefly present subjects with nonsense syllables of different colors, letters and arrangements and instruct them to observe a particular feature. Although there is sensory experience of all aspects of stimulus, subjects will remain oblivious to those aspects that are unrelated to the experimental task (Ogden, 1951). Attitudes are (for Bartlett) an active, holistic and variable orientation to the world, which are powerful determinants of what is remembered from a situation. His experiments on “perceiving and imaging” (Bartlett, 1916) are apt demonstrations of what the person brings to an experience or reaction, rather than assuming that the stimulus itself determines a response. In like fashion, groups do not notice or adopt every new element of culture they encounter in other groups. Only those elements of cultural for which there is some active interest or perceived utility for the group enter into it. As such new technologies are frequently adopted while social organization is particularly resistant to outside influence. History is replete with examples of cultural contact without transmission. For example, groups without large administrative structures found little interest in adopting or recreating systems of writing (Diamond, 1997); Asian painters did not adopt the new perspective painting developed during the Renaissance, though they knew of it. In short, groups like individuals need to be ready for some material if they are to act on it.

**COMPARISON 2: DOMINANCE OF THE PAST OVER THE PRESENT**

“If the experimentalist in psychology once recognizes that he remains to a great extent a clinician, he is forced to realize that the study of any well developed psychological function is possible only in the light of consideration of its history” (Bartlett, 1932, p. 15). This idea of the experimentalist is in direct contrast to the contemporary practice, in which one attempts to manipulate one variable so as to cause a change in another. Such an approach becomes untenable once one recognizes that a person’s life history plays no small role in guiding their present response. In Bartlett’s (1916) early experiments on perceiving and imagining, he found subjects seeing an image, presented for a faction of a second, according to conventional expectations. Also, the ostensibly same inkblot would remind subjects of entirely different things, as a function of their previous experience. Thus, subjects’ past experience played equal or greater role in the reaction than the stimulus. This is because all mental acts for Bartlett involve “an effort after meaning”—that is, a general tendency to connect up some present material to a setting or scheme, which in turn is an organized mass of previous experience. As
Moscovici said somewhere, “we see what we know; we don’t know what we see.” This applies equally to the life of social groups. Any new thing must be given a setting and explanation within the group’s existing frame of reference. What is not given a place will not be attended to by the group. In his book Psychology and Primitive Culture, Bartlett (1923) emphasizes the conservative nature of primitive groups. They tend to hold on to traditional ways of acting in and interpreting the world. Even when change is compulsory, such as forced conversation to Christianity, natives have been found offering Christian paraphernalia to their overthrown deities, thus retaining their traditions at a deeper level (Bartlett, 1925).

**COMPARISON 3: STABILITY THROUGH PLASTICITY**

Both schemata and cultural patterns impose a stable framework on the novelty of the present. In this way, there is continuity in change. Thus, change and stability need to be understood as interdependent opposites: it is precisely through the flexible application of a stable framework that continuity through time is ensured. As Bartlett (1923) said, “it is because the group is selectively conservative that it is also plastic” (pp. 151-152). In other words, the group is able to persevere its traditions by flexibly adapting them to meet new needs. Similarly, at an individual level, we are told that schemata are active and developing, they are the constantly updated standard against which any new response is made. The fact that a continuous standard exists ensures continuity, while the fact it is developing in response to present conditions ensures change. Bartlett (1932) famously gives the example of a stroke made in a game of tennis:

> When I make the stroke I do not, as a matter of fact, produce something absolutely new, and I never merely repeat something old. The stroke is literally manufactured out of the living visual and postural “schemata” of the moment and their interrelations. I may say, I may think that I reproduce exactly a series of text-book movements, but demonstrably I do not; just as, under other circumstances, I may say and think that I reproduce exactly some isolated event which I want to remember, and again demonstrably I do not. (p. 202)

This, however, does not yet describe what happens in remembering in the full human sense of the word, which is a conscious and self-reflective act. Bartlett (1932) calls this “turn[ing] around upon [one’s] own ‘schemata’ and construct[ing] them afresh” (p. 206). It is this activity that he associates with more radical forms of reconstruction.

**COMPARISON 4: RADICAL RECONSTRUCTION**

Bartlett implicitly discusses two forms of reconstruction. In the first changes are introduced through assimilation, simplification and retention of apparently unimportant details (Bartlett, 1932, Ch. 16). This describes the conservation through plasticity discussed above. Bartlett illustrates this process through both his own experiments and with anthropological reports on the transformation of decorate art and cultural practices as they move from one group to another (see Bartlett, 1923, 1932). However, a more radical reconstructive process can also occur, which he calls “social constructiveness.” With this concept Bartlett intended to highlight the fact that groups not only assimilate cultural elements into a familiar cultural framework but are also capable of developing
genuinely new forms by welding “together elements of culture coming from diverse sources and having historically, perhaps, very diverse significance” (Bartlett, 1932, p. 275). Groups have both a past and an orientation to the future—what Bartlett (1923) calls their “prospect.” Social constructiveness points to the creative development of new cultural forms in a group’s movement towards its future. An example would be efforts during the First World War to develop radar detection systems (Bloor, 2000) or new scientific theories like Bartlett’s own (see Bartlett, 1958, Ch. 7). Likewise, at an individual level remembering is said to be constructive because of the interplay of different schemata in the act of remembering. Bartlett (1935, p. 224) gives the example of an enthusiastic journalist’s account of a cricket match: “To describe the batting of one man he finds it necessary to refer to a sonata of Beethoven; the bowling of another reminds him of a piece of beautifully wrought rhythmic prose written by Cardinal Newman.”

**COMPARISON 5: DE- AND RE-CONTEXTUALIZATION**

In radical reconstruction at both individual and group levels parts of one setting must be picked out and placed in another without loosing their identity. With regard to social groups, cultural elements are picked out of one group and brought into another. This happens under various conditions of cultural contact. For example, when an individual group member goes abroad to another group and then returns with new cultural elements, or where two groups live in close contact and a cooperative relationship. The latter case can be contrasted with asymmetrical power relations between groups, which tend to foster an all-or-nothing adoption of the dominant group’s culture (Bartlett, 1923). Thus, whereas symmetrical relations between groups enables a free exchange of cultural elements, asymmetrical relations creates conditions for whole bundles of cultural elements to be accepted together. Bartlett’s mentor W.H.R. Rivers already articulated this theory of cultural dynamics, using a model borrowed from his own work in neurology. In a well-known experiment, Rivers and Head (1908) severed a nerve in Head’s arm and a period of five years detailed the return of sensation to the arm. They found that first a holistic all-or-nothing sensitivity returned (i.e., protopathic sensibility), which registered blunt pressure on the skin but was completely insensitive to stimulation with cotton wool, to pricking with a pin, and to all degrees of heat and cold. Later localized sensitivity (i.e., epicritic sensibility) returned and suppressed the influence of the former. Following the neurologist Hughling Jackson, they thought the former was evolutionarily a more primitive response. The idea moves from physiology to culture and then to psychology in Bartlett’s work. At an individual level, Bartlett (1932) argues it is through the function of images that elements of one setting are picked out and inserted in another. Images, like cultural elements, should not be seen as fixed entities but rather as living and constantly changing. In so doing, they are able to better respond to new demands in a changing environment. Still, in some cases images (especially visual) remain disconnected in consciousness, yet they have the potential to be integrated with others. Returning again to the social group, Bartlett (1923) describes how often new subgroups develop around newly adopted foreign cultural elements and thus tending not to mix with other existing elements. In these cases, social constructiveness will only occur to a minimal degree.
**CONCLUSIONS: MORE THAN AN ANALOGY?**

Although there are conceptual parallels between individual and group levels, schemata and cultural patterns, neither one is reducible to the other. On the one hand, properties of social groups (their norms, values and traditions) cannot be reduced to the sum of individual members within them. Certain behavior does not occur outside of a social group’s framework. On the other hand, the individual is not the automaton of the group. One can say that their character is shaped by the social group but not determined by it. As a result of their unique history and combining of different schemata an individual’s experience has a personal quality.

To say that individual and group processes cannot be reduced to the other, however, is not to say that they are independent of each other. In many ways they overlap and support one another. As already mentioned, Bartlett even uses the phrase “social schemata” and “group schemata” to refer to what in *Psychology and Primitive Culture* he called “cultural patterns”: “It may be that social conventions, institutions and traditions formed by persistent group tendencies constitute ‘group schemata’; just as the individual images, ideas and trains of thought formed by persistent interests constitute ‘individual schemata’” (Bartlett, 1932, p. 299). Yet, at the same time, Bartlett is critical of applying certain psychological terms, such as “memory,” to a social group. Criticizing Halbwachs (1925), he argues that remembering is done in a group, not by a group (Bartlett, 1932). By this he meant that psychological acts are socially situated and should be interpreted as such. The locus of causality rests with the person making a response, not in the social group.

This notion that mind is a social formation and yet irreducible to social processes comes close to other social-cultural theorists, such as Vygotsky, Mead and Janet (Rosa, 1996). Bartlett’s work is particularly insightful in that he offers us both a socially situated psychological theory as well as a psychologically informed theory of cultural dynamics. In this paper, I have shown how these two inform each other in Bartlett’s thinking. This was done in part to overcome the traditional interpretation of Bartlett as a proto-cognitive psychologist, by illustrating how his early work on cultural dynamics, to a great extent, informed his work on remembering, which he is most famous for. In sum, this paper can be seen as reconstruction of Bartlett’s theory for the development of a culturally inclusive psychology.

**REFERENCES**


Chapter 32

Methodological reflections on Leontiev’s Activity Theory: Activity Theory and ‘The Logic of History’

Giorgos Kakarinos
Technical University of Crete, Greece

SUMMARY

Activity Theory was formulated and developed around 1930s by A.N. Leontiev and S.L. Rubinstein respectively as an attempt to override the contradictions and limitations of the major currents in psychology during the first decades of the 20th century (behaviorism, introspective psychology, psychoanalysis) on the basis of Marxist philosophy and Lev Vygotsky’s cultural-historical psychology. Leontiev and Rubinstein have been the founders of the two major versions of the theoretical approaches that placed the category of activity at the core of psychological analysis. These two versions share some common basic theoretical positions although they are characterized by important differentiations as well. In the following chapter we discuss the basic methodological characteristics of A.N. Leontiev’s Activity Theory, focusing especially on its limitations and internal contradictions. Our goal is to trace the possibility of dialectical overriding of Activity Theory in the context of a more developed theoretical and methodological framework, based on the achievements of V.A. Vazioulín’s “Logic of History” approach.

THE APPEARANCE OF LEONTIEV’ S ACTIVITY THEORY

A.N. Leontiev developed his theoretical approach on the basis of L.S. Vygotsky’s cultural-historical psychology, although he differed from Vygotsky (his teacher and colleague), on one of the most basic principles of the latter’s approach, i.e., on the process of internalization. More concretely, Vygotsky, in his theoretical approach, underlined the significance of social influences on the ontogenetic development of human psychology, elaborating the concept of internalization, as the specific mechanism that relates the social environment with the psychological activity of the developing subject. According to the “genetic law of cultural development,” formulated by Vygotsky, any function in the child’s cultural development appears at two levels: first it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interspsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This transition from the social to the psychological plane constitutes the process of internalization (Haenen, 1993).

According to Vygotsky’s approach, it is speech (especially “word meaning” and concepts) that functions as the most important means for the transmission of social, cultural experiences from adults to children. Therefore, Vygotsky chose the category of word-meaning as a unit for the analysis of consciousness (Haenen, 1993). Consequently, he tended to adopt the French sociological school’s conception of internalization (expressed in psychology by J. Piaget), as the process of transmission of ideal-cultural elements to a, primarily non-social, biological consciousness. In this conception, the transformation of the interpsychological to the intrapsychological
resulted directly from the sphere of human communication (Kouvelas, 2007; Dafermos, 2002). This position had been criticised by Vygotsky’s partners (like Leontiev and Galperin) as well as other Soviet psychologists, like Rubinstein. Leontiev criticised Vygotsky’s view that the development of word-meaning is the result of social interaction as a person, in this case, is conceived of not as a social, but as a communicative being. However, consciousness is treated as a result of absolutely internal, ideal processes, while the role of external, practical activity on its formation is completely underestimated (Dafermos, 2002).

We could argue that Activity Theory has been elaborated on the basis of the main theoretical and methodological positions of Vygotsky’s cultural-historical psychology, but, at the same time, it was founded on Leontiev’s criticism on Vygotsky’s conception of the process of internalization. In the context of Activity Theory, Leontiev elaborated a more developed and concrete, but also differentiated, understanding of internalization. Kharkov school members (i.e., Leontiev, Galperin, Zaporozhets, Zinchenko and others) considered activity (as Galperin put it) as a means of bringing psychology “out of the closed world of consciousness” (Haenen, 1993, p. 77). A new conception of internalization process had been developed: it is no more the social that transforms to psychic, but it is external, practical activity, developing under social influences, that is internalized and transforms into psychic activity.

Activity Theory modified the way psychological phenomena were approached: they were no more considered as autonomous and self-existent, and their scientific explanation presupposed the analysis of the relation between the subject and the surrounding social environment, i.e., primarily the analysis of the subject’s practical, material activity. According to Leontiev, through the category of activity, we can override the dichotomy between external world and internal psychic phenomena, and instead pose a new problem, that of the study of the relation, connection and mutual transition between external practical and internal activity (Leontiev, n.d.). According to Rubinstein, the conception of human consciousness’s determination by external, practical activity can overcome the dichotomy between social and individual, internal and external, while it remains the foundation for the scientific study of human psychism (Rubinstein, 1987).

**CRITICISM, LIMITATIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS OF LEONTIEV’ S ACTIVITY THEORY**

The approach to consciousness in the context of Leontiev’s Activity Theory has substantiated the determinant role of an organism’s practical, external activity on the type of reflection of reality that characterizes it. In the case of human, this theoretical conception has been expressed through the principle of the unity of activity and consciousness. This principle was an attempt to override the limitations of both introspective psychology, that studied consciousness as something primary and immediately given and excluded activity from the psychological study, and behaviorism, that focused only in external behavior and ignored internal psychic processes as a subject matter for psychology (Rubinstein, 1987). In the context of activity, there has been an attempt to create a whole system of psychological concepts and categories, a system sufficient to approach not only discrete psychological functions (such as perception, memory, speech, and thought) but also human psychism as a
whole. This led to the analysis of the internal structure of activity and human psychism, as well as to the systematic study of their phylogenesis and ontogenesis.

As Activity Theory based investigations were developed, the limitations of experimental approaches had become clear, while the theoretical and methodological core of Activity Theory had been criticized at the same time. In general, Activity Theory can be criticized from a Marxist point of view, as well as from the aspect of other philosophical currents (phenomenology, positivism, postmodern; e.g., Lektorskii, 2004). In the following paragraphs we will refer systematically to the criticism to Leontiev’s theory that was articulated by philosophers and psychologists that can be categorized in the Marxist tradition. The presentation of the limitations and contradictions of Leontiev’s Activity Theory that follows is based on an analytical model, where the different characteristics are mentioned side-by-side, as relatively independent, while the internal relations between each other are partly ignored. This method of presentation, despite the fact that it absolutizes the limitations of the whole theoretical system, is the most suitable for systematically locating its weak points and contradictions, as a precondition for any attempt to override them.

**The relation between internal and external activity**

Leontiev’s Activity Theory has received criticism from many psychologists because of the way the relation between external, practical and internal, psychic activity is conceived. According to Leontiev the process of internalization can be described as the transformation of external activity to internal, psychic activity. However, Rubinstein’s approach differed on this point. According to the latter, in the context of Leontiev’s theoretical system the dependence of internal activity on external activity is overstressed, while the inner structure and content of psychic activity itself is not revealed (Dafermos, 2002). As far as the relation between internal and external activity is concerned, while in Leontiev’s approach external causes determine the psychic development of the children directly, Rubinstein stresses the role of external causes on internal conditions, “the external acts only through the internal” (Brushlinskii, 2004, pp. 72-73). At the same period, other Soviet psychologists, like Menchinskaia, criticized Leontiev’s supporters and colleagues for reduction of internal, mental activity to external, practical activity, as their notion of internal activity is solely concerned with the content and structure of external activity (Haenen, 1993). According to Zinchenko, in the psychological theory of activity consciousness turned out to be no more than a “copy” of activity, and this fact reveals our ignorance about consciousness itself (Zinchenko, 2004, p. 40). Although Leontiev introduced the category of activity in his psychological system in order to tackle the opposition between external and internal that characterizes all psychological approaches based on Cartesian philosophical tradition, according to Leontiev’s colleague Galperin, this goal was not achieved as “the external remained external and the internal remained internal” (Zinchenko, 2004, p. 33). Conclusively we could argue that, in Leontiev’s approach, it is partly ignored that human activity is characterized by continuous, successive internalizations and externalizations, by mutual transitions from the external to the internal and vice-versa, while the emphasis is put on the process of internalization only.
The underestimation of the active role of the subject of activity

A basic feature of Leontiev’s Activity Theory is the underestimation of the active role of the subject of activity. This feature was revealed especially in the experimental researches of Leontiev and his partners (such as Galperin), concerning matters of pedagogical psychology and more generally matters of ontogenetic development of human psychism. As Rubinstein mentioned, in Leontiev’s perception of education, learning process is reduced to the assimilation of fixed knowledge, of predetermined products and results of the process of cognition. Kalmykova, while referring to Galperin’s approach about learning, criticized his perception of the learner as a passive recipient of the curriculum content, which turned the learning process to an “one-way transmission” (Haenen, 1993, p. 138). This underestimation of the active, creative role of the subject of activity, not only in the learning process, but more generally in the whole system of Activity Theory, has been mentioned by other researchers as well (Blunden, 2009). According to Zinchenko, in the context of Activity Theory, the participants in an activity are considered as faceless subjects or functionaries who do not have their own I but are organs of the activity. From here it is but one step to subjectless activity (Zinchenko, 2004, p. 63).

Of course Leontiev does not in any case deny the role of the subject in the determination of the whole system of activity. It is not accidental that his system of analysis about the structure of activity includes concepts such as the motive or the personal sense which have a clearly subjective meaning, namely they demonstrate the one-sided, subjective refraction of the surrounding world by the subject. However the main goal of Leontiev’s analysis is the education of the whole system of psychic processes from the practical activity of human subjects (Dafermos, 2002). This implies that Leontiev’s approach emphasizes the determination of the internal, mental activity by the external, practical activity, without referring systematically to the reverse influence of mental on practical activity—that is, to the way the developing psychic life of the subject determines the type and content of practical, external activity this subject will be involved in. As a result, in many cases the process of determination of external activity by the internal rests outside Leontiev’s investigation field, while it is considered as something given. As Leontiev (1979) admitted:

The subjective selection of the goal (i.e., the conscious perception of the most immediate result to be attained if the subject is to perform the activity that will satisfy the motive) is a special process that is almost completely uninvestigated.

Under laboratory conditions or in pedagogical experiments, we always give the subject a “prepared” goal; therefore, the process of goal formation usually escapes the investigator's attention. (p. 62)

However this underestimation of the active role of the subject should not be attributed only to the limitations of the experimental process, but results lawfully from the basic conceptual framework of Activity Theory, especially from the way the relation between internal and external activity is considered. According to Brushlinskii, if psychism is considered to be organized on the basis of external activity, i.e., if the formula “from (only) the external to the internal” is adopted, then the sources of the individual’s activeness are wholly outside of him from the beginning. In this approach we have only one-sided, unidirectional movement from society to the individual. Hence the latter’s passivity: he is merely an object of social influences and a product of the development of society, and not a subject at all (Lazarev, 2004).
This conception of the individual as a passive object of social influences and not as an active subject is related to the social reality in the USSR and the goals that were posed and pursued by psychology as a social science after the October revolution. Fundamentally, the elaboration of the scientific foundations of psychology influenced the theoretical and experimental research of many Soviet psychologists during the first decades after the revolution. Its objective was to facilitate, through the appropriate educational and other social interventions, the creation of the new man of socialist society, as well as the optimum organization and rationalization of the production of the socialist state and the creation of better labor conditions (Petrovsky, 1990). In the context of these ambitious goals it was inevitable to consider human subjects not from the point of view of their activeness, independence and of their self-inclusive tensions of personal development, but as objects developing only under the external influence of society according to specific goals (Rozin, 2004). As a result, there were many cases where the interaction between individuals (for example during the education process or inside the division of labor for the organization of production) was conceived as an activity for the creation of objects according to an initial aim (Lektorskii, 2004). Of great significance for the development of such a conception, was the fact that the great majority of the population, especially of the peasants, in the USSR was characterized by an extremely low level of psychological development (e.g., illiteracy and very low living standard). As a consequence, the psychological and cultural development of these people presupposed the decisive role of external, conscious interventions, while the possibilities for spontaneous development were minimized.

The non-developing, non-historical approach of activity

Some researchers criticized the fact that activity is not defined by Leontiev as a developing phenomenon. According to Lazarev, no distinction is drawn between its simplest forms and the forms that correspond to higher levels of development (Lazarev, 2004, p. 40). Although in the analysis of ontogenesis the transition from one main activity to another is described (according to the general model play-education-labour), what is absent is the distinction between the simplest and the most developed forms of activity inside each separate category. To illustrate using the case of labor, according to Leontiev’s model there is no distinction between more and less developed forms of labor. Consequently there can be no differentiations between the psychic development of different subjects. As a result, every adult who works, regardless of the type of his labor activity, is considered to be on the same level of psychic development. According to Leontiev, the main dimension of human personality is the concrete hierarchy of the motives of the subject’s activities. Consequently, a personality should be considered developed if its main motive-goal does not isolate the subject, but on the contrary associates substantially his life with the lives of other people, even with the prospects of human society as a whole. Therefore, a subject is a developed personality when he becomes, according to Gorky’s phrase, “the man of mankind” (Leontiev, n.d., p. 228). However, in this analysis it seems that the hierarchy between the subject’s different motives is not related (or is only externally related) with the content of his labor activity; with the characteristics of the labor process. In other words, the subject’s motive hierarchy is considered as independent not only concerning the object of labor activity, but also of other internal characteristics of labor such as its creative, developing or, on the contrary, monotonous, indifferent or even destructive character for the
subject. In this theoretical framework, the question of the type of labor activity that is related with the appearance of developed personalities is not even posed (and of course it is not answered).

The logical and historical presuppositions for the transition to human activity

The logical reconstruction of the categories of Activity Theory, as well as the historical approach of its subject matter (whether it is activity, psychism, or personality) have as their starting point of analysis the category of human activity. From the point of both the logical and historical analysis of the subject matter, we should mention that before reaching the category (logically) or the appearance (historically) of human activity, it is necessary to examine which are its necessary and sufficient preconditions. As Ivanov mentions, human activity, which appears as something given in the psychological analysis, already comprises an entire complex of fundamental problems of philosophical analysis. Consequently, the psychological investigation of activity falls into contradiction when the question of its sources is posed (Lazarev, 2004). Other researchers as well posed the question of the presuppositions, the motives, the necessity and the sources of human activity (Haenen, 1993; Hakkarainen, 2004; Zinchenko, 2004; Mikhailov, 2006).

The question of the origin and the presuppositions of human activity is sharply posed if we bear in mind that a necessary condition of any human activity is the existence of a subject that is capable of performing it, i.e., of a subject with a more or less developed psychic life. As a result, from this theoretical analysis, a vicious circle arises: in order to derive human psychism from activity it is necessary to assume that its subject already has some psychic properties, for otherwise there is no activity. In order to resolve this contradiction one is compelled to presuppose (as Rubinstein did) the existence of preactivity forms of human psychism to go beyond activity as the sole basis of human subjectivity (Lazarev, 2004, p. 38). Thereafter, human activity ceases to be the starting point of psychological analysis.

This problem arises not only from the logical reconstruction of the system of psychological categories, but also from the experimental data of human psychism’s ontogenesis, as well from the historical study of human society evolution. As far as human ontogenesis is concerned, contemporary research in Developmental Psychology (Kugiumtzakis, 2008), substantiates the theoretical conception that human psychism appears and begins to develop before the birth of the subject, as a result of the interaction between genetic predispositions and external stimuli. In addition, the psychic development of the child presupposes and is accompanied by a corresponding biological analysis. This means that human activity does not precede but follows subject’s psychic development, at least as far as the primary stages of ontogenesis (intrauterine and fetal period) are concerned. This fact questions the applicability of Activity Theory model, at least on these stages of psychological development, as the principle of internalization cannot be applied in the case of intrauterine psychic development, where there is no external activity to be internalized. If the significance of biological maturation, and the role of specific biological features (such as idiosyncrasy, dispositions and type of the nervous system) is also taken into account, we can conclude that the general direction of psychic development in ontogenesis is not from (only) the external to the internal, but always one of constant interaction between the external and the internal (Brushliński, 2004). Similar conclusions are drawn by the study of the structure and the historical
evolution of human society. In this case, the interaction between individuals as biological organisms and with their environment, in the form of consumption for the satisfaction of their basic human needs, is considered to be the starting point of logical and historical analysis of society as an organic whole. Additionally human labour activity develops for the satisfaction of these needs, when the latter is not possible through the simple crop of ready-made products of nature (Vaziioulin, 2004). Consequently, in the case of human society phylogenesis as well, the appearance of human activity does not comprise the primary phenomenon, but activity arises on the basis of specific necessary conditions.

Activity Theory’s sociologism

The lack of systematic investigation of human activity presuppositions in the logical and historical (phylogenetic and ontogenetic) analysis of human psychology, leads to the sociology that characterizes Activity Theory. The analysis has as its starting point human activity, which is conceived as primarily social, with characteristics like the mediation by (material and ideal) products of human culture and its collective-intersubjective character. Thus, the emphasis is put on the role of internalization of this activity in the ontogenetic development of the subject. The assimilation of socially developed activity by the child is considered to be the main (or even the sole) factor of human ontogenesis, while the role of biological determinants in this process is systematically underestimated. As far as the problem of the relation between the social and the biological in human ontogenesis is concerned, Leontiev’s approach to the problem of the relation between human needs and activity is valuable. In fact, Leontiev’s references on this matter are quite contradictory. While in some of his texts Leontiev considers human needs as a necessary condition for the appearance of human activity (Leontiev, 2009). This means that the starting point of analysis has to be the category of need. However, in other papers he adopts the scheme activity-need-activity (instead of the scheme need-activity-need) rendering needs products of human activity (Leontiev, n.d., p. 201). According to the activity-need-activity model, the starting point of analysis is not human need but human social activity. In this way Leontiev conceptualizes needs as socially created, stressing the difference between human and animal, simply biological, needs. However, what is not taken into account here is the fact that human needs also have a directly biological character before being transformed and developed by the subject into forms of human social activity.

At this point it is necessary to refer to the scientific conclusions that can be drawn from the study of ontogenesis in deaf-blind children during their education in Zagorsk in USSR. What should be emphasized is that the impressive results achieved here demonstrate not only the effectiveness of some strictly practical principles of special education, but also the validity and scientific power of the whole theoretical framework that directed this educational process, i.e., the validity of Activity Theory. Many psychologists and philosophers in the USSR (e.g. Luria, Leontiev, Davydov, Zaporozhets, Galperin and Ilyenkov) considered the Zagorsk school’s achievements to be an “experimentum crassis” that substantiated the scientific validity of Activity Theory (Bakhurst & Padden, 1991, p. 210). However, while it is undoubtedly so that the Zagorsk school’s results demonstrated the superiority of cultural-historical psychology, and especially of Activity Theory, in relation to other scientific approaches on the problem of human psychic ontogenesis, these results have at the same time shown
Activity Theory’s limitations. Specifically, in relation between needs and activity, and more generally between the biological and the social in ontogenesis, it became apparent from the education of deaf-blind children that the first activity that emerges is that which is directed towards the satisfaction of primary physical needs (like feeding, self-defense and excretion). As far as these needs are satisfied through the use of socially developed objects and tools, the child assimilates human experience and the modes of action linked with these objects and tools. As a result biological needs direct the child towards humanized objects and necessitates human methods for achieving their satisfaction; in other words, they develop into human needs while at the same time secondary, socio-historical needs arise (Mescheryakov, 2009). This means that the existence of human biological needs is a necessary precondition for the development of human activity.

**CONCLUSION: TOWARDS THE SUBLATION OF ACTIVITY THEORY**

Previously, we emphasized that the analytic presentation of Activity Theory’s limitations should not lead to the false conclusion that the specific features of the theoretical framework of the activity approach we referred to are not closely interrelated with each other. For example, the reduction of internal to external activity is related to the underestimation of the active role of the subject, sociologism, and the use of the category of activity as the starting point of analysis. All these methodological features result from the basic theoretical and methodological positions on which Activity Theory is based. This point is of great importance for every attempt to supersede the limitations and contradictions of Activity Theory, since it implies that this supersession presupposes, not only the fragmentary overriding of separate weak points of activity approach, but of the elaboration of a whole alternative theoretical framework in psychology, that will develop a more broad treatment of these issues, through a different, more developed, system of psychological concepts and categories. Such a theoretical framework should at the same time preserve the major achievements of Activity Theory, subsuming them in a broader context.

Such a theoretical and methodological project presupposes the development of the theoretical core of the activity approach, which, in our opinion, concerns the role of the category of activity in the whole system of categories of activity approach. More concretely, the basic methodological feature of Activity Theory is the confusion between the categories of the unit of analysis and the essence of the object under investigation (Dafermos, 2002). As described before, the category of activity is conceived at the same time as the unit of analysis (i.e., the starting point), and the essence of human personality. From this methodological conception, there arise significant achievements, but also the limitations and contradictions of Activity Theory.

Consequently, any attempt to develop the theoretical and experimental achievements of the activity approach presupposes the distinction between the unit of analysis and the essence of personality, and the methodological investigation of the logical and historical preconditions for the appearance of human activity. We believe that those preconditions should be sought in the characteristics of the individual as a biological organism, especially in the category of human biological needs. In this direction, the analysis of the structure and the historical development of human society as an organic whole,
achieved in the context of V.A. Vazioulin’s “Logic of History” (Vazioulin, 2004) approach open up great possibilities for the development of psychological theory.

REFERENCES


Chapter 33

Ancient Greek philosophical dialogue and contemporary psychology

Manolis Dafermos
University of Crete, Greece

SUMMARY

The paper is an attempt to analyze the concept of philosophical dialogue in Ancient Greece. Ancient philosophical dialogue was situated in a particular historical context where no absolute distinction was made between self and other, meaning that individuals were not seen as isolated entities. Further, open dialogue was not seen as constituting the linguistic expression of pre-existing knowledge, but rather as a strategy of searching for truth. The paper argues that this awareness of the interactive, dialogical character of thinking and searching for knowledge, one of the greatest achievements of ancient Greek philosophy, can make an important contribution to contemporary critical psychological theorizing, because philosophical dialogue was not only considered a cognitive adventure, but a means to live a good and virtuous life and of achieve well-being. To put this argument into context this paper will present some similarities and differences between ancient philosophical dialogue and central contemporary dialogical theories (Bakhtin’s dialogical approach, cultural-historical psychology). The ultimate aim then is to demonstrate the importance of ancient Greek philosophy for theoretical psychology and to promote a fresh dialogue between the past and present in theoretical psychology.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades many dialogical approaches and theories of dialogical self have appeared. Many thinkers talk about a “dialogical turn” in the human and social sciences (Camic & Joas, 2003). In particular, the works of Michael Bakhtin (1987, 1994) and Lev Vygotsky (1997) have inspired modern researchers who accepted dialogical approaches. While the concept of dialogue is not new and has existed since ancient Greek philosophy much prior to Bakhtin’s theory, it has acquired different meanings in different sociohistorical contexts.

In the present paper, I attempt to trace the concept of philosophical dialogue in Ancient Greece and its relationships with several contemporary psychological theories. Such an exploration of ancient philosophical dialogue in the concrete sociohistorical setting of ancient Greek society can inform the conceptualization of dialogue in theoretical psychology today and help reframe it into a new perspective. One of the central questions we need to address in this context will be whether the ancient Greek concept of dialogue is comparable to the concept of dialogue in dialogical approaches in psychology.

Dialogue as a distinctive literary form was used by many ancient thinkers (Zeno of Elea, Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, etc.) (Nikulin, 2006). However, Plato is recognized “as being the best writer of dialogues and as the originator of a whole literary genre … which is a genre of dialogue as speech or discussion involving questions and answers” (Nikoulin, 2006, p. 1). This paper will focus mainly on Plato, because Plato’s dialogues
remain the main source of information on ancient philosophical dialogue. Dialogue as literary form is used in different ways in different phases of Plato’s life, but an analysis of the differences of the meaning of dialogue in those different periods is beyond the scope of the present paper. In this paper I will focus mainly on evaluating the relevance of Plato’s dialogues for contemporary critical psychological theorizing. Four main issues will be discussed. First, I attempt to contextualize the ancient philosophical dialogue in a particular socio-historical setting. Second, I analyze some dimensions of the Bakhtinian interpretation of Plato-Socratic dialogue, in order to demonstrate one of the main influences for modern critical theorizing on dialogue in psychology. Third, I explore another dominant influence on dialogical theorizing in psychology, by looking at the links between Vygotsky’s and Plato’s views on dialogue. Moreover, I consider several differences between Plato and positivistic psychology.

**DIALOGUE IN THE ANCIENT GREEK SOCIO-CULTURAL SETTING**

The word “dialogue” comes from the Greek words “logos” and “dia”, the latter meaning “through,” “between,” and “across” (Jenlik & Banathy, 2005). Logos originates from the Greek word “legein,” “to speak.” Dialogue means the logos (discourse) through other people (Dellis, 2002, p. 109); the discourse that is mediated by the interaction between people. In this sense dialogue is sharing through language practice.

We can distinguish three basic meanings of the concept of “logos” in Ancient Greek philosophy: (a) the first meaning refers to speech; to oral conversation; (b) the second meaning is “dianoia,” discursive thinking (“syllogizesthai”, “dianoeisthai”); (c) the third refers to objective reason, the rational order of the cosmos (reason as a cosmic force). Plato likened logos to a “living creature” composed by elements in a particular proportion (Plato, 1961a). In neoplatonic tradition dialogue was presented as a vibrant and beautiful cosmos (“microcosm”) (Westerink, 1962).

The appearance of philosophical dialogue in Ancient Greece was closely connected to the development of the ancient Greek city-state. The ancient Greek city-state was a political association of people who lived in a particular territorial area. Ancient philosophical dialogue could be understood in the context of the polis as a community of actively participating citizens. In classical ancient Greece the philosophical dialogue was not an external interaction of private, isolated individuals, but a participatory practice of citizens in the political community. During the sixth to the fourth century BC in the Greek city-state democracy flourished (Cartledge, 2009).

A wide range of forms of dialogues existed in the city-states: political, philosophical, dramatic and judicial dialogue had been developed. It is worth mentioning the dialogical mode of drama, the dialogical character of political decision making, the daily market discussions, the symposium talks, etc., because the active participation of citizens in social life was realized through these various forms of dialogue.

There are some important differences between the philosophy and science that appeared in the context of modern bourgeois society (which started to emerge in Renaissance Europe) and the philosophy that appeared in the context of the Greek polis in the fifth century BC. The differences central to our argument have to do with the processes of privatization and individualization in Western society, which have influenced the formation of social sciences, including psychology.
Historically then, it is possible to trace the gradual emergence of an individualized self to growing questions of privatization, individualization, and objectification. The fledgling discipline of psychology recruited this objectified self to its early investigatory programs” (Stam, 2006, p. 103).

However, the analysis of relationships between people before the rise of the individualized self requires further investigation. Whilst ancient philosophical dialogue differs from contemporary concepts of dialogue (that often have an individualistic orientation), it is not produced by a homogenous or monolithic “non-western concept of personhood that emphasized sociality, the collectivity” (Rasmussen, 2008, p. 36).

In Ancient Greece anyone who did not actively participate in public life was considered ignorant. The English word “idiot” comes from the Ancient Greek word “ideotes,” private citizen or individual (from “idos,” private, “one’s own”). “Idiotes” were people who were concerned only about their individual interest and ignored the needs of the political community. In Ancient Greece, unlike modern Western society, individualism was not regarded as a virtue but as a defect. For Aristotle “man is by nature a political animal” (Aristotle, 1984a). People are seen to only achieve the good life by living as citizens, as participants of a political community. According to Aristotle, contrary to the self-sufficiency of the gods, the well-being of people is relational (“katheteron”) (Aristotle, 1984b). The well-being of human being is not based on self-sufficiency, but includes as essential relationships with others and their happiness. In Plato’s dialogues the well-being of individuals derives from the well-being of his own polis (Jackson, Lycos & Tarrant, 1998). In this sense we can say that ancient Greek polis was characterized by the “blurring of the boundary between public and private,” and “privileging of public, political, collective space” (Cartledge, 2009, p. 18).

Hence, in Ancient Greece people did not present themselves as separate (indeed, alienated) individuals, but as active citizens of a local political community. Accordingly, philosophical thinking was not considered the private mental activity of separate individuals, as we have come to see it since Descartes (1998) in Western philosophy. Instead it was seen as participatory, public activity in the community. Philosophy in Ancient Greece was developed as a type of learning that required the participation of the citizens of city-state in the particular philosophical community. Initiation into philosophy was impossible without membership of a particular philosophical school or philosophical tradition. The philosophical training and development of philosophical thinking was not feasible outside the collaborative interaction and dialogue between teachers and their students (listeners).

According to Diogenes Laertius (1925), Protagor was the first philosopher who taught rhetoric and used the art of dialogue. Here dialogue took the form of a competition (“agôn”) of words, which were contentious public debates between competing speakers. Dialogue, as used as a tool of mediation by the Sophists, contributed to promoting the idea of the relativity of all things and the abandonment of dogmatic views about eternal, timeless truths. This relativist view of the Sophists implied humility and respect for others.

Socrates was Plato’s teacher and a source of inspiration for the majority of Plato’s dialogues. Socrates contributed to changing the character of dialogue from that presented by the Sophists, to one that turned it into a means of searching for a moral lifestyle. “I tell you that to let no day pass without discussing goodness and all the other subjects about which you hear me talking and examining both myself and others is
really the very best thing that a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living” (Plato, 1961b).

The examination of self and relationships with others is from then on considered an essential activity of human life, because the unexamined life is not seen as worth living. However, as mentioned above the Socratic examination of life was not an individual activity, but it was precisely mediated through sharing and dialogue. Searching for the essential truth was realized through dialogue as a form of community interaction.

Plato’s dialogues took place in particular Athenian institutions: the gymasia, the court and the prison system, education, symposiums. Most participants in Plato’s dialogues were masculine, educated and urban. On the margins of dialogues were women, children, slaves, non-Greek speakers (Blondell, 2004). In other words, dialogue was a product of the ancient polis, which was ultimately based on slavery, the subordination of women, the division between Greeks and barbarians, and the denigration of labor.

Crucially, Plato used dialogue as a genre for the presentation of his philosophical ideas. Plato suggested the dialectic method as an art of dialogue that was differentiated from the eristic method used by the Sophists. Contrary to the eristic method, which is aimed solely at winning a debate, the dialectic method focuses on discovering the truth through dialogic examination of different viewpoints and perspectives on some philosophical subject. “Socrates: And him who knows how to ask and answer you would call a dialectician? Hermogens: Yes. That would be his name” (Plato, 1961c, p. 390).

**A BAKHTINIAN INTERPRETATION OF SOCRASTIC DIALOGUE**

Russian literary theorist and philosopher Bakhtin (1895-1975) developed his own version of Socratic dialogue which is quite different from versions presented in traditional philosophical literature. Usually, Plato’s dialogues are considered merely as collections of arguments, an understanding that can be criticized as leading to the monologization of dialogue. Bakhtin has challenged this interpretation of Socratic dialogues, offering his version of Socratic dialogue from the perspective his own theory of dialogue as exchange of speaking subjects (Zappen, 2004).

Challenging what he perceived as a common misconception, Bakhtin highlighted that dialogue is not a word game, but a serious joint effort, a collective investigation of crucial questions connected with people’s life. He outlines that participants of dialogue should present their true viewpoints and be prepared to modify their deep beliefs as a result of dialogical exchange. Socratic dialogues are presented by Bakhtin as a multi-styled, multi-social-language dialogue; a specific, hybrid combination of “high” investigation of the world and parody borrowed from the “lower” spheres of life and folk-carnival debate (Bakhtin, 1987, p. 25). According to Bakhtin, the deep philosophical Socratic dialogue has carnavalistic dimensions. He writes, “we have laugher, Socratic laughter (reduced to irony), the entire system of Socratic degradations combined with a serious, lofty and the first time truly free investigation of the world, of man and human thought” (Bakhtin, 1987, p. 25).

Bakhtin focused on carnival and the ambivalent images of the participants of Socratic dialogues, which associated closely with Menippean satire. Socrates, as central hero of dialogue, is a “combination of beauty and ugliness” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 132), a personification of the wise ignorance. Bakhtin argues that the Socratic “I am” is not a particular private “I”—“with no witnesses, without any concessions to the voice of a
‘third person’” (Bakhtin, 1987, p. 145). According to Bakhtin then, Socratic self-knowledge is not an individual searching, but a dialogical action through the interaction with other participants of dialogue. In other words, Socratic self-consciousness is a communal act. Dialogue is more than the speech and thought of particular persons. Understood in this way ancient philosophical dialogue is a social world of interaction of participants in the community of the polis. Inspired by Socratic dialogue, Bakhtin developed the concept of dialogic truth. “Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 110).

In the time since ancient Greek philosophy and the onset of modern philosophy the dialogical approach had been lost and dialogue “finally degenerated into the question-and-answer form of training neophytes (i.e., the catechism)” (Bakhtin, 1973, p. 90). Drawing on his own exploration of Socratic dialogue, Bakhtin introduced a broad concept of open-ended dialogue, which became the central concept of his linguistic theory:

Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293).

However, there are important differences between Bakhtin’s and Plato’s concepts of dialogue. Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, which has influenced dialogical psychology (Clegg & Salgado, 2011), is based on the acknowledgement of equal rights for all dialogic participants. Such formal equality was impossible in Plato’s hierarchical world, where it was taken for granted that, for example, women would not be able to enter dialogue. Also, the mutual respect of participants of Platonic dialogue did not lead to the acknowledgement their equality in the modern meaning of this word. Another difference is that in Plato’s dialogues the participants were guided by Socrates, who played a central role and helped them realize and overcome their ignorance. Moreover, the relationships between Socrates and his interlocutors vary in Plato’s different dialogues. Matushov, using a conversational analysis found that:

… dialogue with free people seems radically different than his dialogue with the Slave and all these dialogues are different from Socrates’ declaration about his own method. Dialogue with free people was highly ontological, subjectivized, dramatic, improvisational, truth-seeking, challenged Socrates himself, and was unsafe for Socrates’ public reputation. Meanwhile the dialogue with the Slave was decontextualized, objectivized, hierarchical, contrived, rigidly pre-designed, pleasing Socrates, non-challenging for Socrates, and safe for Socrates’ public reputation” (Matusov, 2009, p. 48).

Without a contextualization of the concept of dialogue it is impossible to understand the differences between ancient philosophical dialogue and contemporary dialogical theories in psychology. To sum up, a reflection on ancient philosophical dialogue was one of the sources of Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, which offers theoretical psychology an original way to conceptualize the human psyche.

**DIALOGUE FROM PLATO TO VYGOTSKY**

The Soviet psychologist Vygotsky (1896-1934) was the founder of cultural historical psychology. Contrary to what critics have labeled as positivist approaches to
psychology (e.g., Baker, 1992; Danziger 1997), which regard psychological phenomena as the sum of simple, homogeneous, separated components or variables (Ratner, 1997), cultural-historical psychology suggests analysis by units that preserve “all the basic characteristics of the whole” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 46). Positivism in psychology is based on the description of psychological phenomena in terms of variables than in terms of human subjects (Baker, 1992). Logical positivism is based on methodological individualism, the claim that “all social phenomena are wholly explainable in terms of facts about individuals” (O’Shaughnessy, 2010, p. 175). For example, Neurath pointed out that “Peoples, states, age groups, religious communities, all are complexes built up of single individuals” (Neurath, 1973, p. 387). In this context such positivist approaches have also been criticized as being reductionist, as they are seen to view complex psychological phenomena to be reducible to their separated components or elements (Ratner, 1997).

At first glance, the very idea of a relationship between Vygotsky’s and Plato’s views may seem paradoxical. However, if we look deeper, we will find links between Vygotsky’s “height psychology” (Yaroshevsky & Gurgenidze, 1997, p. 351; Robbins, 1999, p. v) focused on potential of human development and Plato’s “psychagogia” (from Greek words “psyche,” soul and “agoge,” lead out of), which means “the art of leading the soul through words” (Yunis, 2009, p. 236). “Psychagogia” refers to the formation of people’s souls through discourse. More precisely, “psychagogia” is a process through which a person leads another to revelation of knowledge through dialogue. Self-knowledge and personal development can be achieved through dialogue with other people. Plato’s dialogues represent a kind of communication between an expert teacher and a less expert learner. Socrates accounts his method “in terms of psychic maieutics, that is the midwifery of the soul” (Grazzini, 2007, p. 130). The teacher as an “intellectual midwife” assists the birth of ideas in the soul of learner. This presents a similarity with Vygotsky’s concept of learning and development. Vygotsky’s “height psychology” emphasized the potential for development through social collaboration. Vygotsky’s cultural-historical psychology has emerged as a study of the origin and development of higher mental functions (Veresov, 2010). According to Vygotsky, psychological functions are not products of an individual organism in isolation, but they form in joint, collective activity of an individual with other people. He coined the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Dialogue between the expert teacher and less expert learner is one the dimensions of Vygotsky’s concept of zone of proximal development, which brings to mind Plato’s concept of “psychic maieutics.”

However, there is an essential difference between Plato’s concept of “psychic maieutics” and Vygotsky’s concept of ZPD. Plato’s concept of “psychic maieutics” is based on Plato’s theory of innate ideas that exist prior to man’s birth and through true learning man can recall them. Vygotsky rejected Plato’s nativism adhering to genetic-developmental approach.

We would like to show that it is possible however, to identify similarities between Plato’s idea of thinking as dialogue of the soul with itself, and Vygotsky’s idea of dialogic nature of higher forms of cognition. Plato defined thinking as “a discourse that the mind carries on with itself about any subject it is considering” (Plato, 1961d). Plato
believed that thinking is a conversation of the soul with itself in considering particular subjects. “[T]hinking and discourse are the same thing, except that what we call thinking is, precisely, the inward dialogue by the mind with itself without spoken sound” (Plato, 1961d, p. 263). Plato argued that there is an internal relationship between thinking and dialogue. Thinking is an inner dialogue of the soul with itself. As outlined earlier, dialogue was presented in Plato’s works as a model of the soul in thought. Tracing these ideas we can see that Plato developed a concept of dialogical thinking which is closely associated with Vygotsky’s idea of socially shared cognition. This view stands in contrast to the individualistic assumptions of positivistic Western research in traditional psychology (Wertsch & Tulviste, 2005). Plato’s approach is contrary to individualistic psychological ways of seeing the world that modern traditional psychology has been criticized for (Parker, 2007), and where thought is seen as connected with the single, isolated, private mind inside individual heads. Hence Plato’s suggestion that thinking is develops through dialogue stands in contrast to positivistic psychology, which often regards speech and thinking as separate functions. Vygotsky’s cultural-historical psychology, as well as Plato’s philosophical psychology, is in marked contrast to the methodological individualism of positivistic psychology. Herein we can detect similarities between Vygotsky’s cultural-historical psychology and Plato’s philosophical psychology.

Vygotsky (1997) pointed out that there are no independent, separated functions of thinking and speech, but that instead there are complex psychological systems. Similarly Plato focused on the unity of thinking and dialogue from the perspective of the local community (yet this aspect was lost in modern philosophy and recuperated into the modern concept of individualized). In ancient Greece it was not a straightforward opposition of the “public” versus “private” (Cartledge, 2009, p. 18). In a similar vein Vygotsky (1987) stressed the unity of thinking and speech, of generalization and communication from the perspective of the critique of individualized society.

Further, Plato criticized empiricism and reductionism in a way similar to that of current critical psychology and Vygotsky’s approach. For example, “the attempt to separate everything from other things not only strikes a discordant note but amounts to a crude defiance of the philosophical Muse ... This isolation of everything from everything else means a complete abolition of all discourse” (Plato, 1961d, pp. 259-260). Critics of mainstream Western psychology (e.g., Parker, 2004) have pointed out that positivist psychology leads exactly to the complete abolition of all discourse which Plato refers to; and in a different social and scientific context, Vygotsky accepted also a dialectical, antireductionist approach to psychological processes.

The relationships between oral speech and written speech are another potential point of convergence of Vygotsky’s and Plato’s views. According to Plato (1961a), dialogue provides an opportunity to clarify the meaning of written words by asking questions. Plato described real difficulties of understanding of written speech. Difficulties in understanding of written speech have also been analyzed by Vygotsky. According to Vygotsky, written speech is more abstract than oral speech. “It is speech without an interlocutor … it requires an abstraction from the auditory aspects of speech and an abstraction from the interlocutor” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 202-203).

Although there are significant differences between platonic philosophical psychology and cultural-historical psychology, a comparative analysis reveals that there are essential points of convergence of Vygotsky’s and Plato’s views: a dialectical, antireductionist approach, the idea of dialogic nature of thinking, highlighting the
benefits of oral speech for the development of mind and mutual understanding between people, etc.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, there are important differences between philosophical psychological knowledge in Ancient Greece and contemporary psychology. In Ancient Greece psychology was not a separate scientific discipline with specific subject matter and methods of study. Psychological knowledge had been considered as a branch of philosophy that studied the soul. In this particular scientific context there was not and could not be a developed system of psychological concepts. Danziger (1997) has shown that the conceptual framework of psychological knowledge has changed during the history of the human mind. Further, we should not underestimate the significant differences between the modern Western psychology and the ancient Greek approach to relationships between the private and public domain. “[W]e find that the classical writers look for the expression of the personal core, not in the private or the inner life of the individual, as moderns are inclined to do, but in his public life” (Danziger, 1997, p. 26). In the classical era there was not a gap between the public and individual sphere.

However, in this chapter I aimed to demonstrate that a reflection on ancient philosophical dialogue constitutes a source for inspiration for contemporary critical psychological theorizing. Ancient philosophical dialogue was not an interaction of separated and alienated individuals, but a communal act. The absence of a gap between the public and individual spheres in ancient Greek city-states demonstrates the historical character of psychological functions and thus in turn illustrates the historical limitations of individualistic and positivist psychological ways of seeing the world. The awareness of the dialogical character of thinking and the understanding of dialogue as an open-ended process of interaction of active subjects then makes an important contribution to psychology. Bakhtin was inspired by Socratic dialogue to develop his theory of dialogism, which offers the framework enabling the understanding of crucial issues of theoretical psychology (for example, the dialogic conception of truth).

I also illustrated how a reflection on the relationship between platonic philosophical psychology and Vygotsky’s cultural-historical psychology can contribute to development of an attractive alternative to the positivistic approach still dominant in psychology. More specifically, Plato’s dialogical, antireductionist approach to the human mind provides an alternative to the reductionism and methodological individualism of positivistic psychology. Furthermore, the Platonic concept of “psychagogia,” as a process of a revelation of knowledge through dialogue, offers a creative concept that could be developed further in contemporary theoretical psychology. Searching for the essential truth was presented by Plato not as an individual cognitive activity, but mainly as an ongoing dialogic process within a community. Dialogism as a theoretical framework for the understanding of human psyche (Shotter & Billig, 1998; Stam, 2006; Clegg & Salgado, 2011) is then underlined as a strong alternative to the cognitivism which constitutes a leading force in contemporary traditional psychology.

Both the analysis of earlier stages of development of psychology as a science and a dialogue between the past and present of psychological knowledge remains a question for further investigation (Dafermos, 2010). The dialogue between the past and present
of psychological knowledge is “contradictory, multi-speached and heterogeneous” (Bakhtin, 1994, p. 119).

REFERENCES


Chapter 34

(Theories are) More than words: Why images are significant to theoretical psychology

Martin Wieser & Thomas Slunecko
University of Vienna, Austria

SUMMARY

Following arguments of the science historian Ludwik Fleck, this paper aims to transcend the traditional text view of science and theory which is still influential in the history of psychology up to the present day. This text view of science is a close relative of the statement view of science, i.e., of the idea that science is all about assigning truth value to assertions which are put forward in the form of written statements. Ignoring the iconic material provided in the discipline’s past, historians of psychology have left out some far-reaching resources to understand the past and present of the discipline. By presenting approaches from the history of science, image sciences, diagrammatics, and science and technology studies, we promote a broader view of how images can be included into the historical account.

ON IMAGES AND THEORIES

What defines a psychological theory? As simple as the question may seem, the more complex and ambiguous it becomes when into the subject. Although, up until the present day, very little consent had been reached on what exactly a psychological theory is (Stam, 2006; Stam, Rogers, & Gergen, 1987), Euro-American experimental psychology have understood its main objective as the formulation and examination of theories for nearly a hundred years now.

However widely the definitions of the term “theory” may vary within psychological sub-disciplines and schools, there is one widespread implicit comprehension of theories which mainly derives from logical empiricism. Basically, this position refers to theories as logically coherent systems of statements about empirical phenomena. This sentence-view of science can be found in such influential works as Carnap’s Logical structure of the world from 1926, where he defines a theory as an axiomatic formal system (Carnap, 1967); or in Popper’s Logic of scientific discovery from 1935: “A scientist, whether theorist or experimenter, puts forward statements, or system of statements, and tests them step by step” (Popper, 2002, p. 3).

As is well known in the history of psychology, logical empiricism strongly influenced functionalism, behaviorism, and cognitive psychology in terms of how theories were formulated and contested. What we want to point out here is the fact that not only mainstream psychology adopted this textual view from a particular strand in philosophy of science—logical empiricism—but that also its history was written in a very similar manner. Historians of psychology have, for most of the time, written texts about texts. According to this historiographic tradition, what is thought to be relevant
for the historian of psychology is to be found in the theories, which were thought to be presented in the written argument.

Since the 1960s, however, history of psychology has widened and opened its research interests onto the political, social, historical, and cultural circumstances which boosted certain types of psychological knowledge both inside and outside of the laboratory and foreclosed other possible types of knowledge. The various influences and dependencies of psychology—its historical context—came into focus and replaced the “Whig history” view of a linear, accumulating process of psychological knowledge independent of the “outer” social sphere. In professional historical work, theories become contextualized and detached from their “great inventors” and the corresponding “great man” or “big heads” perspective; rather, they came to be seen as “hatchlings” of their cultural “breeding grounds,” i.e., the social-economic spheres in which they were spawned, and became successful and popular for a certain period. And yet, despite the remarkable broadening of research interests in the history of psychology, it still suffers from the heritage of logical empiricism, insofar as it implicitly adheres to a kind of “statement view of science” and considers the “core” of psychological thinking—the theory—predominantly or even exclusively as a matter of sentences.

The ongoing success of this logocentric view of science seems all the more surprising, as contemporary experimental psychology and neuropsychology heavily rely on flow charts, frequency tables, statistical diagrams as well as fMRI-, CT- and PET-images. Especially the latter ones are often enough considered as “proof” of an argument by “showing” an object as is “in nature.” While the use of iconic objects and imaging procedures have been widespread in experimental psychology for decades now, their popularity in scientific practice is still hardly visible in the historiography of psychology. In this paper, we want to take a first step towards an “icon-informed” history of psychology. Such history would not ignore the images and graphics in psychological textbooks or depreciate them as mere “illustrations” or “decorations” of the written text with no value of their own. Following some arguments of the science historian Ludwik Fleck, we want to point out the significance of iconic media when analyzing the discipline’s past. Furthermore, we will offer some methodological remarks about how the historian could handle iconic material. Altogether, we want to highlight the fact that images have become so essential in many psychological fields that one may legitimately consider them as elementary parts of a psychological theory.

**IMAGES AS “IDEOGRAMS”: LUDWIK FLECK’S PROPOSAL OF A COMPARATIVE EPistemology**

In his major work *Genesis and development of a scientific fact* from 1935, Ludwik Fleck presented a view of science and epistemology which fundamentally differs from logical positivism and empiricism. As Fleck argues, scientific experience is not constituted by a passively observing subject and an isolated object. Rather, scientific thinking and researching is always embedded in what he calls a “thought style,” a collective way of seeing and categorizing an aspect of the world in a meaningful and structured manner.

Thus, in Fleck’s account, scientific thinking loosens its strong connection with “truth” and turns into a question of “style.” This has important epistemological ramifications, insofar as it amounts to an early praxeological move: “Style” is something that has to be practiced, and it is in resonance with anything else that is
happening in an interacting and communicating social collective. More specific to the argument that we entertain here, the appearance of non-textual elements in scientific writing and their relation with textual elements also turn into questions of “style.”

Thought styles define the vocabulary and categories which a scientist has to use to communicate his observations in an understandable way to his or her scientific community, the “thought collective.” Fleck defines a “thought style” as “directed perception, with corresponding mental and objective assimilation of what has been so perceived” (Fleck, 1979, p. 99), a style of comprehension which is deeply influenced by its historical tradition, available technological instruments and social circumstances as well as religious and metaphysical backgrounds. Identifying structures and objects is not a process of “mirroring” an outside “reality” in a scientist’s mind; rather it is an act of active selection, an act which is embedded in a socially mediated practice, and is promoted by pressures or power groups who benefit from such selection. Once educated in a certain thought style and absorbed into a distinctive thought collective, scientists tend to overestimate their way of seeing and categorizing the world as the only appropriate one, while competing thought styles with different vocabularies appear as just arbitrary and superficial constructs that cannot be translated any more.

Fleck develops his argument by means of a series of anatomical illustrations from Europe and Persia, ranging from the middle ages up to the late 19th century. Although all these images refer to the same object—the human body—they hardly resemble each other; at times details appear which a contemporary anatomist simply does not know of; at other times bodily features are missing which seem of utmost importance nowadays. Fleck argues that these scientific images of the human body are “ideograms,” because they don’t represent the body as a “natural form” but as a meaningful concept, as “graphic representations of certain ideas and certain meanings. It involves a kind of comprehending where the meaning is represented as a property of the objects illustrated” (Fleck, 1979, p. 137). Images shape and spawn patterns and connections of what is considered to be relevant by their respective authors. None of them are “closer” or more “distant” to the “real object” than others. Rather, all images have to be understood in their own terms as elements of grasping a phenomenon by visualizing it, as a way of translating thought style specific observations and concepts onto a graphical medium.

This is why Fleck’s argumentation is so useful for the history of science: it allows us to regard iconic objects as documents of how investigation objects were “made visible” in a certain tradition without presuming any “real objects” behind the graphical representations. Becoming inducted into a certain thought style means getting familiar with how things should “look like.” Therefore, scientific images in textbooks always fulfill a pedagogical function, since thought style specific patterns are inscribed into the graphical object and the student learns to recognize them. Images teach and shape the scientist’s eye. In this regard, a closer look at the images of any scientific tradition can reveal how objects of investigation were constituted by their graphical “representations,” how certain aspects of it were highlighted and others neglected, which of its properties were taken for granted and others denied, and which conditions shaped this particular visualization.

To exemplify our suggestion, we now take a closer look at Fig. 1, which is taken out of Donald Broadbent’s Perception and communication from 1958. While the shape of this figure may seem very familiar to the contemporary psychologist’s eye, it is in fact one of the earliest documents of the information-processing approach in experimental
psychology. Basically, arrowed lines are used here to signify the “channels of information,” while rectangles with inscriptions signify the “processors” of information. Broadbent’s model was concerned with the capabilities and limits of human attention, which is why his theory also became famous as the “bottle-neck” or “filter” theory of attention. Without going into further details of his theory, just note how a kind of “stream” (signified by several parallel lines) on the very left side emerges out of the void and reaches the box entitled “senses.” Further to the right, this stream first passes a “store” and a then “filter,” out of which just one line proceeds further to the right. After the “limited capacity channel” (the “bottleneck”), several connections to an “output system” and “effectors” on the upper right are visible, while some channels also lead back to previous stages in a feedback-loop manner.

As evident and unpretentious as this flow chart may seem, it is nevertheless strongly influenced by cybernetic metaphysics, electro-technical computer engineering and information theory, which all were developed about ten years before they were adopted into psychology in the late 1950s. Broadbent, who became director of the Applied Psychology Research Unit in Cambridge in 1958, an institution devoted to experimental research on industrial and military issues, was concerned about how workers could achieve the right performance in an industrial working environment. The limits of human attention in a mechanical workspace were a key problem in this area, and Broadbent’s model depicted the human contribution to the working process just like any other electronic unit involved in it. The rectangles-and-lines style of drawing flow charts in fact derives from electronic engineering and drafting circuit layouts. In cybernetic thinking (e.g., Ashby, 1956; Wiener, 1961) there was no ontological difference between man, animal and machine, just different levels of complexity in terms of information-processing. Against this economic and technological background, Broadbent could propose a concept of human attention as a problem of limited information processing. Furthermore, fig. 1 proposes a very specific kind of psychological research, which is concerned with temporal performances and the “storage capacity” of human thinking and perceiving, while questions of the content or context of a communication process vanish completely.

We cannot go deeper into the specifications of cybernetic imaging techniques in psychology at this point. In a recent paper (Wieser & Slunecko, in press) we followed Ludwik Fleck’s suggestion of a “comparative epistemology” by analyzing and comparing images used in different psychological thought styles. Thereby, we showed how distinctive iconic media are intimately related to their thought styles as well as to certain kinds of therapeutic and experimental practice.

Although Fleck’s embedding of images into the historical analysis proves to be most fruitful for the history of psychology, he made no exact methodological remarks on how images may be analyzed. This is why we will introduce some more recent suggestions to overcome the logocentric view of science.
ANALYZING IMAGES, ANALYZING PSYCHOLOGY

From its very beginnings, psychology had to deal with a very fundamental problem: the invisibility of its objects of investigation. Different answers and suggestions on how the psyche could be “transported” onto the realm of visible objects were given by each psychological tradition, depending on philosophical positions as well as available technological devices and research interests. Because of the wide variance of iconic material provided in psychology’s history, we are not presuming any generalizations about images per se, but rather suggest adjusting the methodology on the specific type of image which is to be analyzed. We have yet to learn how to think “iconically” in our methods (Przyborski & Slunecko, 2011).

One of the oldest and most established ways of making human thinking and feeling visible is the diagram. The flow chart in fig. 1 is an example of this media, as well as the famous drawings in Freud’s The Ego and the Id (Freud, 1961; cf. Wieser, in press) or Lewin’s Topological psychology (Lewin, 1936). Along with this energetic comprehension of the human psyche goes a thought style specific way of iconic (re-)presentation: Both Lewin and Freud visualize an approximately closed system, wherein energy is floating between different parts or strata and may be “discharged” only through the motor system (where it is “transformed” into physical impulses) onto the outside. While Lewin’s figures are structured by a topological structure of central/peripheral, Freud’s figures display a top-down arrangement. This topological difference resembles Lewin’s rejection of the sexual needs or “lower instincts” as sole producer of psychical “energies” and his special interest in situational “quasi-needs.” The strong outline border in fig. 2 is a common and most significant feature, ontologically separating the “inner” mental domain from the “outer” physical environment. The dynamics and possible regularities within the border are determined by the psyche’s inherent structure – by its separation into “regions,” “layers,” or “strata” as well as by motor action which is launched or “steered” from inside towards the environment.

As this small example has shown, diagrams need to be considered as media in their own right, combining graphical and textual components into a genuine composition. The affordances of diagrammatic schemes became central in the young field of diagrammatics (Gormans, 2000; Bogen & Thürlemann, 2003; Bogen, 2005). As these authors argued, diagrams constitute meaning by using a dichotomous spatial order (up/down, left/right, inside/outside, etc.). Conceptual proximity and hierarchy is usually visualized by spatial closeness and order, while lines can be used to separate different “areas” or “regions” of the mind (as was done by Kurt Lewin and Sigmund Freud) as well as “connectors” between different “stages” of processing information (Broadbent).

Fig. 2: “Topology of the person” (Lewin, 1936, p. 181)
By analyzing the shape and superstructure of a diagram, the historian of psychology may reveal the metaphysical, technological or cultural influences on a psychological tradition. Working as “operative powerful shapes, controlling actions beyond the mere contemplation of what is seen” (Bogen, 2005, p. 153-154, transl. MW), diagrams not only constitute scientific thinking in terms of theory, but also imply and evoke a specific therapeutic or experimental practice. In the case of Broadbent and the early cognitive psychology, a very new vocabulary was about to shift into the therapeutic approaches of Ellis (1962) and Beck (1979). Instead of the psychoanalytic dynamic “forces” or “drives” which may have to be balanced out, cognitive therapy speaks in terms of “reprogramming” human thinking and perceiving by “correcting” irrational, dysfunctional patterns of information processing.

Michael Lynch showed that diagrams and other images are often enough used in the social sciences rather for rhetoric purposes than for adding content, creating an “impression of rationality” within a textual economy” (Lynch, 1991, p. 11), simulating formalization and mathematical accuracy.

Recently, the interdisciplinary work of art theory, image sciences, visual studies and science history has spawned a great research interest in the interrelation of art, drawing conventions and scientists’ depicting of their findings and theories from the Renaissance up to the present day (Crary, 1992; Kemp, 2006). Thereby, images are analyzed as distinctive actors for constructing meaning in scientific discourses and may be analyzed with the help of, amongst others, analytical inventory developed in art theory and art history. However, as iconic media is nowadays also used during the research process and has continuously moved into the center of neuropsychology and cognitive sciences, a different approach in analyzing this material may be evenly useful – one that is not only interested in the iconic material as a final product, but also in the way it is created and distributed.

Many disciplines nowadays depend heavily on image-producing devices such as fMRI, CT and PET to communicate their findings, both inside the community and onto the public. At the same time, their output shows a broad political and social impact, such as when schizophrenia or other mental disorders are “shown” or gender differences are “found” and imprinted on a brain scan. Occasionally, brain scans were also used to “proof” the insanity of a defendant before court; when doing so, such scans were obviously not regarded as images which require an expert knowledge for interpretation (Dumit, 1999).

By analyzing the process of how these images were created, one can show how they are constantly adjusted to the needs and uses of the scientific collective, how they are used in aesthetic as well as rhetorical manners to convince colleagues and the public. On this level, imaging techniques can be seen as a socially mediated practice, requiring a certain technical know-how as well as the ability to interpret these images (to distinguish, for example, between image interferences and something that is “really there”). Far from being pure and transparent “copies” or “mirrors” of the objects they pretend to represent, the high-tech images of fMRI, CT and PET may rather be analyzed as highly artificial products of a long chain of human and non-human actors. Prominently Latour (1999) and Rheinberger (2010) promoted this approach which is also very common in contemporary science and technology studies (cf. Beaulieu, 2002; Joyce 2005; Prasad, 2005, Pauwels, 2006), media theory, and sociology of science. Focusing on the technical instruments, on data handling procedures as well as on the communicative processes within the laboratory, these studies take a closer look at the
role of images in the development of the research process in the laboratory. As Sturm and Ash (2005) have pointed out, the increasing implementation of technological devices has had an important influence on how psychology developed from the early 19th century up to the present times. For instance, the studies of Borek (2005) and Rösler (2005) revealed how the EEG as a new way of graphical recording fundamentally changed psychology in terms of experimentation as well as theorizing. Questions on how instruments and technologies shape the discipline become increasingly urgent as psychology nowadays appears more prone to technological influence than ever (cf. Gundlach, 2007; Gigerenzer & Sturm, 2007).

From this perspective it is less important what images and instruments mean, but what they perform as active participants in the hybrid collective of human and non-human actors in the laboratory. Although these studies sometimes tend to decontextualize and de-politicize laboratory work, they still provide a critical perspective and safeguard against a too naïve consideration of images as transparent mediators of “natural objects.”

CONCLUSION

In challenging the traditional view of science as a matter of texts, which derives from logical empiricism, we proposed a broader view of the history of psychology by including images into the historical analysis. In doing so, we plead for a genre-specific, detailed historical analysis. The diagram, for example, has specific affordances and a specific “entanglement” with textual elements that have to be taken into account in such analysis. Two different approaches were presented: The first one, inspired by Ludwik Fleck and image sciences, concentrates on questions of meaning produced by iconic media in scientific publications. From this perspective, images are regarded as parts of psychological theories and discourses, constituting the investigation object by its distinctive iconological means. The second approach presented here was mainly developed in the science and technology studies. It is concerned in how scientific practice and experience are shaped by the graphical output at any stage of a research process as well as the various technological, social, and cultural circumstances which co-constituted the end product. Both approaches may have their pros and cons, depending on the material and research questions of a historical investigation. Altogether, we plead for an icon-informed history of psychology, wherein the images and diagrams of the discipline’s past are taken seriously into the historical account.

REFERENCES


Chapter 35

Not a theory, but more than a word:
An enquiry into the neoliberal mind and psyche

Dieter Redlich
Universität Duisburg-Essen, Germany

SUMMARY

Talcott Parsons is an apologetic of the bourgeois system. Yet his description of the phenomena of his idealized society is valid. Still, how can a valid description result from an invalid analysis and then be turned by Parsons into an invalid normative prescription? It is an old methodological problem which needs new discussion under changing scientific and political frameworks. It might yield interesting results to discuss Parsons’ central concept of the “cathexis” with regard to ever changing concepts of (individual) freedom that are not limited to Milton Freedman’s famous “freedom of choice”, since even what is chosen as a cathetic object depends on the content of Pandora’s Box which contains more-than-ever imagined self-destructive-like objects of the libido. It would be too easy, and probably wrong, to psychologize such cathetic desires and to label them as pathological.

CATHEXIS: BETWEEN PSYCHOANALYSIS AND SOCIOLOGY

Freud made use of the Greek word “cathexis,” basically meaning “holding on to” and better known as Freud’s (1991/1895) notion of the lust for an object, the so-called “libido fixation” to an object. Sexual energy is supposed to be finally responsible—in a rather causal-mechanical way—that an object, person or thing promises sexual satisfaction and therefore gains the important meaning of causing a person to invest any possible means to obtain satisfaction from the object of his desire. The origin of the chosen object and the quality it has are exclusively determined by the subject. Object and property have the ontological status of “being-for” the subject. Their “being-in-itself” are outside any “objective” or “real” consideration (there is no physical, chemical, or universally cultural detectable quality of shoes, money, cars etc. that make them sexually attractive).

Freud’s concept could be regarded as being completely irrelevant to any social understanding of “reality” and could be dismissed as a description of phenomena of fetishism which doubtlessly do exist and do have a social impact, but which the analysis of is only apt to grasp psychic reality and not the social one in which the psychic ones are embedded.

It is interesting to see that Parsons (1964/1951) attempts to bridge the traditional gulf between psychology and sociology and that he has achieved some remarkable results. Parsons’ work is particularly rich in his “wealth of categories.” One of his central categories—often revised—is Freud’s notion of cathexis, which he uses to describe and analyse the psychological and social framework of modern society. In short, this category is the core, which helps to tie up the complexity of behavioral patterns, which move the individual to find orientation in his society and thereby develop an awareness.
of himself: “Cathetic orientation ... is inherently particularized, to particular objects and ordered combinations of them” (Parsons, 1964/1951, p. 62).

**HISTORICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION: THE CATHETIC AS FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF BOURGEOIS BELIEF**

It is common knowledge that the rise of bourgeois society—most likely to be located in the Italian city-states, especially of the late 13th century Florence—found its adequate political-philosophical program with Rousseau (1754a/1754; 1754b/1762). It was Rousseau’s program (and not so much Hobbes’ or Locke’s in England) that became politically fertile for the American and French Revolutions. It contains the fundamental principle of bourgeois belief: the belief that “modern man” in his “modern society” is determined by the difference between the homo politicus (“citoyen”) and the homo oeconomicus (“bourgeois”), the political and the bourgeois man. Immanuel Kant’s terminology professes that this difference is inherent in man and manifests itself as his “public” and “private” usage of reason. Kant was aware that “private” has the meaning of “lack” and even of “robbery,” as we find it in today’s lexeme “deprivation.” A private piece of land presupposes common (communal) land from which that piece has been cut off. The original was the undividable common good. Accordingly, the “common,” general, universal usage of reason can never be harmed by a differing, individual praxis—thus Kant (*Beantwortung der Frage: “Was ist Aufklärung?”* 1784). Kant allows for “circumstances” like that of an army at war, where the soldier has to follow orders without reasoning, though even he could practice his freedom of reason and publish his ideas.

Kant’s ideology is idealistic to the degree of naivety, since he believes that the “age of reason” is bound to fully manifest itself and make all “circumstances” obsolete and pave the way for enlightened mankind to peacefully follow Kantian ethics.

Rousseau was accused of having prepared the French revolutionary Jacobian path for the “petty bourgeois” who clings to his private property; which he works privately and of which he keeps the gains in his private bank account. Rousseau’s dialectics demand a—finally not very peaceful—coexistence of the political and private sphere of any given society. Private now constitutes economic endeavors, which should be left to competing individuals. Whatever they do, they will do it within the public framework of their society or State, respectively. Rousseau’s description of his republican ideas is an outline of a logical and practical contradiction, since each sphere has a reality sui generis and therefore is and should be independent of the other. Still, Rousseau’s concept was historically more successful and is still more successful than any idealistic (Kant), Marxist or anarchist communism. It gained normative power and became prescriptive, after the French Revolution, to the individual behavior of the ruling class and likewise to the attempts of the ruled classes to secure their private interests.

Thus we have inherited with our modern bourgeois societies a legacy which we find expressed in the motto: “privatization of profits, socialization of losses”—the kind of social reality that is the object of Parsons’ studies. In other words, what the inherent logic of the theories yields is this: Kant makes use of a *logical inclusion* (“private” is thought of as secondary to public), whereas Rousseau applied an *antithetical* logic where “practical circumstances,” interests and demands are *antagonistic*. Kant’s
philosophy of “pure reason” creates a harmonious idea of mankind, which will not suffer from inherent and irreconcilable contradictions.

**Example taken from the history of France**

The historical digression is to be understood as a valid description of today’s reality: The French farmer, after 1789, was “freed” of his obligations to his former (feudal) landlord. With the “assignates” he could buy his plot of land and start working on what he liked to produce. He was legally free, having reached the legal status of the private owner of his means of production. The Revolution had accomplished its task—the farmer was free. The moment the market became global, less than a hundred years later with telegraphs, steamers, railways etc., the private farmer needed machinery and that meant: capital. The problem was that he became conservative: the “Republican” cause had made him free and he was grateful for that. But under the new conditions, his dependence on banks to follow England’s technical revolution of the agrarian market made him expect new gratifications from the Bonapartes who once had been so generous. But the next emperor, Napoleon III, only promised some tax exemption before elections which were cancelled later. The farmer learnt his lesson that there was no reason to be discontent because to borrow capital, or not, was his private affair.

**LOGIC, PSYCHOLOGY, SOCIOLOGY, AND POLITICS**

Our subject is the value of categories which guide our understanding of reality. In this respect our subject belongs to the realm of logics. Categories aim to systematize how we deal with the phenomena of our past and present reality and how they allow us to be dealt with.

Aristotelian logic knows three areas (extensions) of all possible judgments: the general, the particular, and the individual. The general is to be understood, not as the sum total of its elements, but as the generic notion (man is mortal—some beings are human—Socrates is a human being, thus: he is mortal).

Freud’s logic—as manifest in his judgments—makes use of the general (when talking of mankind, of all human beings, of the genotype) and of the individual. He rarely refers to typified groups of human beings as in his late Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse (Freud, 1921). To Freud there is no mutual relationship between individual(s) and the species. His clinical interest focuses on the individual aberrations from the supposed norm of the species; in this respect his logic is bi-polar: he knows the rule and treats the individual exceptions to the rule. Freud has the knowledge of what causes such individual aberrations. These causes are independent of time, space and culture.

Rousseau’s logic knows the general form (the original, natural human being, called “l’homme”) which encompasses both “belonging to the animal world” and “possessing traits of egoism”; this internal difference manifests itself during the process of civilization where we finally meet a different bi-polarity: the antagonism of “citoyen” and “bourgeois” (“Discours sur l’origine...” and its address “À la République de Genève” and: “Du contrat social”).

Parsons makes use of the logical categories “universal” and “particular.” In our context the universal is the generic notion of man and the particular that of a group or the individual (Parsons here is rather following common language: “particular” means
“any part of a whole”, be it of the extension “one” or “many” in contrast to “all”). His basic distinction is made between the universal and the particular. His analysis of the “orientation problem” may serve as an example:

Thus “honour thy father and thy mother” is stated as a general rule of morality. But it is its form that is general. The content of the obligation is particularistic, namely for each child, towards his particular parents. If the rule were, on the other hand, “pay honour to parents because of their quality of parenthood as such, regardless of whose parents they are”, it would be a universalistic norm. All norms are capable of generality of statement and application (though varying greatly in degree of generality). The question is whether or not discrimination is made between those objects with which ego stands in a particularistic relationship and other objects possessing the same attributes. Such discrimination is incompatible with the conception of a universalistic norm. If parenthood is the relevant attribute, then the norm, if it is universalistic, applies equally to all objects possessing that attribute. (Parsons, 1964/1951, p. 63)

At first glance this statement is puzzling, to say the least. A full quotation of the Commandment (Ex. 20:17) would have made it clearer: “Honour thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.” This moral prescription is indeed valid only for the members of the tribe that secures its relationship to his tribal god by this covenant. The validity of this contract is restricted with respect to time (as long as both partners don’t break it) and space (area of the tribe’s settlement). Norms by definition are, logically speaking, generalizations, e.g. of moral/ethical motives of behavior. So they are not “capable” of generalization, they are generalizations. Parsons obviously means the (quantitative) extension of the validity of the norm as determined by the “party’s” point of view.

According to Parsons the different extensions of norms, respectively the different points of view like the moral norms of a tribe, of a “modern ego,” a nationalist, or a capitalist can rightfully be called “particularistic.” Depending on further extension of validity, they might become potentially “universalistic”, if they are applied to the sum total of beings under consideration.

Parsons’ system sounds archaic since it is so close to the Old Testament, yet it is not. Where the Bible only knows of individuals who have no self-awareness and “hear voices” which tell them what to do (Jaynes, 1976), the bourgeois individual prides itself with a self-conscious ego that decides on any subject matter without a need to be guided by a metaphysical idea of rationality, ethics etc. In Parsons’ words we are “actors” who decide at any given moment what to do. We are the centers of time and space and we decide “where to discriminate.” To enlarge on his moral example: we include or exclude our parents or our boy- or girlfriend’s ancestors or whomever we think fit to be honored or not.

If we extend the realm of validity to a “universalistic” dimension, we would still follow a quantitative process, thereby missing the idea of an ethical value. Rousseau knew why he distinguished the “volonté générale” from the “volonté de tous”: the latter has its spatial and temporal restrictions which the Republican principle of people’s sovereignty does not and would never under any conditions want to be changed. Without mentioning this important difference, Parsons abuses the term “universalistic” and gives it the meaning of a particular stage of social development: the industrialized capitalist societies. When this particular social phenomenon expands, we will have globalization, a euphemism for imperialism. One side effect of such thought and its
implicit logic and language is that it serves to prevent even a discussion of whether mankind desires that imperialism now and for future generations.

An intermediate résumé

So, why not put Parsons into the compartment of the apologetic literature and then forget him?

The only ground where the enemy can be beaten is on his own turf. There, he has not only decided the economic wars to his favor but also consolidated a cultural hegemony that provides “answer-lies” which are simple and easily believed. So far we have to admit that Parsons’ concept will be shared by the convictions of the majority we meet in the “western democracies,” irrespective of education.

But our 19th century French farmer was in misery. He did not want to compete on the global market (is this anticapitalistic or merely an expression of his lack of capital?) and he wanted the standard of living of the average French citizen in the towns. Being the poorest, he had to work hard, his holding being so small that even if he wanted to, modern technology would not pay-off (even if he had the capital or got a loan). He knew that his products were not direly needed because they could be imported; his only social function had been reduced to provide soldiers for the army in Mexico, North Africa, Asia, where half of his likes would die from diseases and none return with riches and glory. So, why did he not revolt? Why was he to be found among the monarchist enemies of social and even socialist (Commune de Paris) movements? Who understood him? It sounds like irony or even cynicism, but unfortunately it is true: The French Communes of 1870/71 needed his support and offered free homes for the retired. What does anybody expect him to believe? There is only one path open to people in such misery and total disillusion: to believe what the Parsons of his days were preaching: rely on your own ideas, rely on what you have learnt from the past, rely on the State, rely on your good agricultural work—and so the farmer did: clinging to his private property that he had been given by the Republican State, the only object he could hold on to.

We might quote modern literature and say to the farmer: “Behind the illusion there is nothing” (Lethem, 2009, p. 86) and play the futile intellectual game, although it does not tell lies. But it won’t be helpful to either the French farmer nor to today’s tens of millions unemployed in the aftermath of the so-called “Subprime Crisis” of 2007 (Reinhart & Rogoff, 2009).

Cognitive orientation

The chosen example of the French farmer should be kept in mind when reading the following extract form Parsons’ (1964/1951) Social System. The positive cathetic operation is activated when connected to some sort of gratification. Nothing can be said about this gratification since the individual ego decides what this aim could be; others may call it an illusion (the tourist who delights in this well-tended plot of land or the unique cheese produced from the single goat the farmer has):

Cognitive orientation is, it may be said, essentially orientation to the element of generalization in the object-world. Cathetic orientation on the other hand, is inherently particularized, to particular objects and ordered combinations of them. (...)
In the case of cathetic orientation and the cognate modes of action- and value-orientation, there is an inherently “subjective” reference to gratification-significance. But the gratificational significance of an orientation can never transcend the particular relational system of which it is a part. (p. 62)

If we understand correctly then the individual strife for gratification is restricted to the previous choice, for example of the social sphere (family, friends etc.) that gives the essential feedback in forms like “you deserved that (gratification).” We are not saddened to learn that the universalistic promise (e.g., of the Catholic Church) that a law-abiding life, the practice of charity etc. is no longer a motivational orientation though still today indulgence can be obtained by paying sums of money to the Church and its worldly affairs. But, if Parsons’ explanation is accepted it would also hold true for an orientation to any kind of alternative life in non-capitalistic societies. And this consequence has to be taken seriously.

**CATHEXIS: THE FUNDAMENTAL LAW OF INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATION AND BEHAVIOR**

With Parsons we find the “primacy of cathetic interests as such” (1964/1951, p. 48) to which even “cognitive considerations” are subjugated (p. 49). It’s a Machiavellian world where everything is secondary to the overruling interest of gaining remuneration/gratification. Where Machiavelli at least had a social object of gaining power and enjoying the privileges you have as a “principe,” our Parsons-actor strives for his personal gain within the system he was born into. The mass of the people never had a chance to belong to the “upper ten.” Their fate was with the lower classes. In a capitalist society nearly anything that could serve as a gratification presupposes money. Parsons’ actors would be ill advised not to strive for this former. If you are unemployed and can’t feed your children, you can’t even expect the social recognition of being a good parent.

Judging Parsons’ theory from a logical point of view, its formal aspect is quite primitive. His thinking is linear. This means, it excludes the effect of mutuality, which is characteristic of all elements of life (in a narrow sense of all biological processes). In dialectical terminology, Parsons avoids systemic thinking when he analyses social phenomena—among the different ego-actors or individuals and groups in their relationship to institutions, not to mention the effects of political economic systems on the actors.

As indicated above, Parsons is richer in his description of social reality, trying to incorporate even Freud’s psychoanalytic categories. Parsons considers carefully all aspects of an “actor” (he is thought of as a person who is actively engaged to find his psychic and social equilibrium): the cognitive aspect, that of social institutions, a system of values, and his general motivational disposition which boils down to a realistic and critical assessment of his acquired abilities and faculties during his lifetime. The reader draws from such description and analysis an ideal person (actor) who is like the ideal consumer when moving through the jungle of a supermarket: he is aware of what he generally desires (food), he checks his resources (contents of his purse), he keeps making decisions according to whether it is more important to impress other people with the ingredients for a meal he wants to compose or whether it might be “better” to focus on food quality etc. Such a person is a responsible (to his preferred group and to himself), rational, culturally mature, and calculating person who tries to achieve the
optimum with regards to all these factors to attain, finally, what he thinks life owes him. The conflicts are at his home, at his office or in the supermarket.

The “need-disposition” system of the individual actor seems to have two most primary or elementary aspects which may be called the “gratification” aspect and the “orientation” aspect. The first concerns the “content” of his interchange with the object world, “what” he gets out of his interaction with it, and what its “costs” are. The second concerns the “how” of his relation to the object world, the patterns or ways in which his relations to it are organized (Parsons, 1964/1951, p. 7).

Our supermarket actor is the “petty bourgeois” whose development Rousseau had initiated: he acts regardless of the political frame and sometimes even in conflict with it. He is the personification of industrial management, constantly pondering how to solve the means-end-problem.

THE BOURGEOIS OR: HOMO HIERATICUS
THE HOLY MAN WHO DARE NOT FAIL

Is he real?

Yes, he is “real.” If he were not, the split between the political and private would not exist. His reality is that of an ideal of which every actor is aware and also that he should achieve these high standards of the ideal as described and categorized by Parsons.

Especially when he fails (the expensive wine he bought wasn’t even noticed by his guests), the social feedback or lack of it will tell him where to look for the failure: it is to be found in his decision-making process. He has failed to consider with utmost care Parsons’ categories and failed to fill them with the particular circumstances of his life and resources.

The bourgeois is a holy person and cannot be criticized because he is autonomous and thus the only one who can be critical of himself (poor Kant used to say he has “reason”). What he might need are books on sociology, ethics, or etiquette etc., that might help him find explanations if he fails.

Then he might even accept psychological counseling along the lines outlined above: to strengthen and improve his system of decision making, to help find the resources he has not been aware of so far. He would occasionally need such support but only if he has not been successful. Then he would consider some help: legal help, social help, financial help etc., which he will duly pay back when he can celebrate a success.

Is the citoyen, the homo politicus, real?

Yes, he is. Without him, we would not know of autonomous, cathetically operating private actors.

The political man has the task to prepare the field for the bourgeois’ operations. The political man is the remover of obstacles for the highly active entrepreneur. That’s enough.

The political man should be wise enough not to limit his decision making by any party programs. He has to be open to criticism all the time. He is the Minister; the Latin word meaning: to serve the bourgeois.

Whoever does not like all that has been discussed so far, and has even developed some aversion against the apparent cynicism, should be warned with what kind of reality she or he is confronted when he or she thinks of humanitarian alternative ways of communal life. The French peasant is a warning to missionaries of all kind, such as the German Democratic socialists were, when rightfully shouting “We are the people,” in
1989, claiming their sovereignty. But then, practically unnoticed, this cry changed to “We are one people,” which meant: “We want to have the same opportunities as our sisters and brothers in West Germany to get such nice gratifications.”

All this socio-political and economic talk might not sound convincing. But if we consider the “really fictional world” of entertainment we find extraordinary phenomena, which are very complicated to explain without Parsons. When NATO began its war against Socialist Yugoslavia, a considerable number of (not only) British subjects were flying in over the weekends to join the UCK in its fight against the Serbs. This is proof of the validity of the category. The importance of the meaning to the individual actor to choose what his ego chooses and desires to be of his own reality, approved by his peer group etc., should not be underestimated, especially if it is considered “fun,” perhaps to replace some felt “ennui.” This desperate search for personal likings fills pages of the yellow press, but it really exists and the preference that is attributed to such objects, which return the gratification in the form of “fun,” is to be found in an ever growing market. Still, this enlargement of the original Freud-Parsons-concept of cathexis by the “aesthetic” concept of the “sublime” (Kant, Burke, Lyotard) requires a much longer discussion...

REFERENCES

Chapter 36

Personality traits: Fuzzy constructs reified then dissolved

Brad Piekkola

Vancouver Island University, Canada

SUMMARY

Walter Mischel (1968) famously delivered what has been considered a devastating blow to the notion of personality traits. He reviewed the evidence for “cross-situational consistency” and rejected the existence of such stable, generalized structures as traits of personality. He thus challenged the existence of inner dispositions that could account for regularities in behavior. The result was the “personality paradox” or the discrepancy between the intuitive belief in stable inner determinants of conduct and the research evidence of inconsistency in behavior over situations. Proponents of trait theory responded by attempting to defend their position with theoretical arguments and new experimental methodologies. What was not challenged, however, was the appropriateness of the standards used to judge trait consistency. This paper examines where these criteria came from and why they were imposed. The validity of these standards is then questioned and an alternative understanding is put forward.

ASSESSING PERSONALITY TRAITS

When Walter Mischel published Personaliy and Assessment (1968) he set off a maelstrom that threatened the very notion of a trait of personality. A central tenet of trait theory had been that traits were enduring and stable dispositions that would manifest as generalized tendencies in behavior. The evidence for such cross-situational generality or consistency was severely challenged in Mischel’s review. The consistency coefficient, the measure of the generality over situations, was found to be a correlation of between 0.3 and 0.4. Mischel also derisively coined the expression personality coefficient (a correlation between 0.2 and 0.3) to refer to the concurrent validity between personality trait questionnaires and some external, non-questionnaire criterion. Mischel concluded that, rather than displaying generality over situations, a person’s behavior displayed situational specificity and variability.

Beyond consistency, various other criteria were established, and imposed, as required for the demonstration of the existence of traits. Traits were expected to show temporal stability or consistency over time, and tests of traits were expected to display reliability and validity and, later, convergent validity and discriminant validity. All such refinements were intended to satisfy acceptable standards of scientific measurement in proving the existence of the construct of interest. The upshot was that these standards were pushing trait concepts towards reification rather than treating them as descriptive labels of behavioral regularities, or of “a range of apparently similar behavior-tendencies” (Allport & Odbert, 1936, p. 9, emphasis in original). Traits proved inadequate to these criteria, as Mischel had been demonstrating, and their existence was questioned. The result was an ongoing controversy that Mischel called the personality paradox (Shoda & Mischel, 2000) in reference to Bem and Allen’s (1974) identification
of the discrepancy between people’s intuitive belief in behavioral consistency over situations versus the lack of experimental confirmation of such consistency.

What was not questioned in subsequent attempts to defend traits against Mischel’s judgment was the validity of the imposed criteria and their appropriateness to the assessment of traits. Instead efforts were made to bolster the traditional methods (see Piekkola, 2011). These standards, however, should have been reconsidered. Characterizing traits in terms of such standards of measurement created a straw-man and set the stage for their invalidation. To justify these claims it is necessary that the historical roots of the matter be examined and that two separate trends in the evolution of personality psychology be recognized. These may be termed the psychometric, an elementalist approach, and the theoretical, a holist formulation. Speaking of those I have labeled the theorists, Woodworth (1951/1931) wrote of the emergence of a group of psychologists who were bemoaning the neglect of the study of the individual person “as a living whole” (p. 251). Their aim was to create a science of personality. Woodworth cites Gordon Allport as the prominent example of the early personality theorists (historically, during the nineteen-twenties and early thirties). The psychometric stream began much earlier with Francis Galton’s (1884) introduction of the fundamental lexical hypothesis and, then, mental testing (1885). It was from this current that the consistency criterion sprang.

THE LEXICAL HYPOTHESIS AND FUZZY CONCEPTS

The fundamental lexical hypothesis is the proposition that the important individual differences that can be identified between people will be verbally encoded in the languages of the world (Goldberg, 1990). It is the proposition that trait terms reflect underlying regularities in personality. Galton (1884), in putting forward this proposition, cautioned that such terms were what today might be called fuzzy concepts. Unlike the classical view of concepts wherein class inclusion is clearly demarcated by defining properties, fuzzy concepts have ill-defined boundaries (Medin, 1989). Galton found that the terms referring to character while possessing a separate shade of meaning also shared a large part of their meaning with other terms. Character terms (now trait terms) overlapped and, in that sense, were fuzzy too. According to Galton one should not assume that because such qualities can be named that they are actually separate or separable. Rather than acting singly they intermix.

Despite Galton’s admonition, such separation and isolation was the direction that psychometric approaches would be headed towards. This was tied to the related caution against the danger of slipping into the error of faculty psychology and assuming that if something can be named it must exist (Symonds, 1924, 1931; Allport, 1928). There was a danger in this of hypostatization or reification (Symonds, 1931). Trait terms, then, may cease to be descriptive of regular patterns, conceptual abstractions, and be taken to designate a concrete psychological entity. This tendency is what underlies the consistency proposition. In fact, the introduction of construct validity (as advocated by the APA Committee on Psychological Tests, 1950-1954; see Cronbach & Meehl, 1955), according to Campbell (1960), actually encouraged trait reification.
TESTING CHARACTER

At the beginning of the twentieth century psychologists were beginning to take an interest in character (the European term for personality—McDougall, 1932), especially in the ways that people differ from each other. Leighton (1902), for instance, pointed out a need to assess individual character since it was being ignored by natural science. Despite that dismissal, Leighton believed it should be considered because individual character was important to conducting life and business. Karl Pearson (1904) was one of the first to take up the problem (Brown, 1923). In this Pearson (1904) was attempting to determine the heredity of mental and moral characteristics, including assertiveness, conscientiousness, and vivacity. Later, Wells (1914) attempted to quantify the adjustment of personality to the environment. In spite of these early attempts, the testing of personality, more rightly, can be said to have emerged from the intelligence testing movement. There were no tests for assessing character (personality) in 1920 (Pressey, 1920) but there was a burgeoning increase in studies of personality (Allport, 1921). Accordingly, Allport wrote that the need for intelligence tests had demonstrated the further necessity of reliable methods for studying other facets of personality.

In 1921 The Journal of Educational Psychology convened a written symposium on the measurement of intelligence and on what to do next (Editor, 1921a). Colvin (in Editor, 1921a) wrote that tests of intelligence were to some degree tests of character and Thurstone (in Editor, 1921b) wrote of the need for tests of character. Poffenberger (1922) summarized the contributions of the symposium members as having placed great importance on character traits. This need was echoed by others as well (Brown, 1923; Charters, 1924; Symonds, 1924). Educators, Charters (1924) argued, needed to address issues of personal qualities; and Cleeton and Knight (1924) pointed out the demand coming from industry for methods to judge character. Amidst the hubbub, Symonds (1924) added the caveat that, before measuring traits, it would be worthwhile to question whether they exist as universal qualities of the individual, and whether they operate independently of the situation the person is in. In addition, he warned that we should be aware of the possibility of nominalism. It is all too likely that lists of traits may be nothing more than mere names. We must be guarded against slipping into the assumption that what can be named must exist—the mistake of faculty psychology. Even if the qualities identified exist, it was all too apparent to Symonds that slight alterations in situations can alter people’s reactions. A person, he noted, may be a snob in one situation but not another. Trustworthiness too depends on the situation. Symonds, in this proposal, could have been the first to raise the matter of trait consistency, but Hartshorne and May (1928) would soon make it an issue by their finding of a lack of consistency in children for the trait of honesty. This would be contentious.

Allport (1937) considered the relatively enduring organization of the individual person to be the cornerstone of the idea of personality. It was this, the coherence in conduct, which consistency was meant to reflect. From the start, the proposition was challenged. Trow (1925), for instance, reported on a lack of trait consistency. He argued that the hope of testing character traits should be given up, that a trait manifesting in one situation does not predict performance in another. Soon after, Newcomb (1929) addressed the issue specifically by seeking evidence of similar responses to situations that differ, or cross-situational consistency, and response uniformity to the same sort of situation. He found no compelling evidence. Allport (1932) responded to the assertion of response specificity of Symonds (1931) by pointing out that no advocate of “trait
psychology” expected every act to be perfectly correlated with every other. The issue of consistency versus specificity had taken root. This was decades before Mischel (1968) would seem to decimate the trait construct, along with the notion of enduring patterns of behavior. The real question that remained, nevertheless, is what exactly consistency should look like. Before considering that, there is a related issue that feeds into it. That is the psychometric concern with trait independence.

**TRAIT INDEPENDENCE**

Trait testing emerged from the intelligence testing movement and was, from the start, focused on establishing better instruments of assessment. The development of improved testing standards preceded character testing but those standards would be incorporated into it. Cattell and Farrand (1896), for instance, expressed concern with what we now call interjudge reliability and introduced the idea of test-retest reliability (not so labeled). Wissler (1901) addressed the issue of criterion validity (not referred to as such) and Spearman (1904) pointed out the need for the assessment of measurement reliability. Otis (1918) brought in test-retest reliability with parallel forms and Hoitsma (1925) added split half reliability and temporal stability. Hoitsma, as an afterthought, also assessed discriminant validity without calling it that (a label that would await Campbell and Fiske, 1959), by finding no correlation between intelligence and introversion. Jersild (1930) primarily sought evidence of discriminant validity for measures of traits. That, in particular, is an indication of the growing concern with personality trait independence among psychometricians. The psychological reality being created, as Danziger (1990) remarked, was one in which personality features were defined independently, isolated, and posited to be free of the influence of situations.

Starting with intelligence testing, Kelley (1928) argued for the need to test the postulated independent mental traits. According to Kelley, the reason for this was that “any trait not discovered and not separately measured will always be a source of uncertainty and confusion” (p. 32). This was in contradistinction to Witty and Lehman (1927) who had already argued that investigators were failing to realize that traits are not entities that are unitary. This was not new. Wells (1914) had noted that, for ease of comprehension, it may be preferable to disunite personality characteristics from each other but, in the final analysis, “No single characteristic can be absolutely separated from other characteristics, any more than a single act is the product of a single motive” (p. 298).

Allport (1928) accepted that every alleged trait would have to be established separately but, as he had contended earlier (Allport, 1924), while there are gains to be had from studying single traits, we must not lose sight of the organized whole, the undivided personality, in which traits function as part of an ensemble. The upshot may be that, as Allport (1924) expressed it, “the traits are there, but the personality is lacking!” (p. 133, emphasis in original). It had to be recognized that personality was an organized whole in which the traits functioned together in the interests of the whole organism. This was a growing concern since such dismemberment would be touted as the way to proceed scientifically. As Thorndike (1934), a decade later, acknowledged, tests were being demanded that measure unitary traits (individual and whole) that are pure (uncorrelated with other traits), and homogeneous (not composed of more than one thing), which were measurable separately.
A Unitary Trait Committee examined the matter between 1931 and 1935 (Holzinger, 1936). Hendrickson (1934) noted that figures of considerable authority, presumably the committee members, were pursuing the proposition that personality is a composite of traits or factors that are isolatable. This had practical implications. In order for a trait to be useful psychologically, Lorge (1935) argued, it must be freed from the influence of other traits. He concluded the following:

Purity of trait, from the point of view of consistency of measurement, from the point of view of reliability of measurement, and from the point of view of independence of measurement, is the only hope in the all too elusive field of personality diagnosis (p. 278).

Note that, in proposing this, the question of trait purity is in the service of measurement and not in understanding traits or personality as a whole. Alexander (1934), to that end, recommended that factor analysis be adopted for the task.

Flanagan (1935), a supporter of factor analysis, believed an ideal personality theory would consist of independent basic elements. Thorndike (1934), on the other hand, had remarked that the tendency to assume unitary traits may not be warranted (even though he had served on the Unitary Traits Committee). Allport found the whole premise of independent factors quite spurious: “By seeking independent (non-correlating) factors, a further abstraction is committed. Traits are not independent of one another; they overlap” (1934, p. 170). Rather, “‘pure’ traits are not to be expected in mental organization, for in fact nothing in mental life is altogether independent of other influences” (Allport & Odbert, 1936, pp. 12-13). “Such an assumption,” he wrote, “is highly artificial. So interwoven is the fabric of personality that it seems almost impossible to think of any patterns that are wholly unrelated to others” (1937, p. 245). The concrete, organized personality was apparently being lost sight of.

DO ABSTRACT TRAITS REPRESENT CONCRETE PERSONALITY?

Vernon and Allport (1931) cautioned that investigators were becoming so caught up in the precision of their instruments that there was a declining concern with their applicability to the problem. In fact, the real concern of those researchers was test stability, rather than trait stability. Furthermore, isolating and measuring single traits gave a misleading, incomplete picture since the significance of any single factor depends on the whole personality in which it is set. Ultimately it is the total personality that should be of concern and it is not addressed by such measurement methods (nor is the trait as embedded in the whole). The concern appears to have been more about developing an acceptable scientific practice to be imposed on personality rather than inquiring into the nature of personality. As it turned out, that trend continued to dominate. In a later Annual Review of Psychology article, Humphreys (1952) pronounced that “A trait measure should not be merely composed of reasonable homogeneous items, but the total score should have zero or near-zero correlations with measures of other traits” (p. 136). In fact, “Zero correlations among all trait measures represents the ideal” (p. 136). That may be what the ideal of testing is but it may not be a reflection of the psychological reality that is the organized personality.

Before the psychometric approach had turned to personality people had recognized the overlapping and intermingling of personality characteristics. Galton (1884) had argued that the moral qualities designated linguistically are “so intermixed that they are
never singly in action” (p. 181). Wells (1914) wrote that “No single characteristic can be absolutely separated from other characteristics” (p. 298). When the arguments were being made in favor of trait isolation, Terman (1934) argued that the significance of the quantity of some trait is never going to be unequivocal since it depends on the complex of traits that it is embedded in. According to Terman, “Personality traits are not merely intercorrelated, but are functionally interactive” (p. 607). Thorpe (1938) even suggested that one trait could be transformed into another. When expressed excessively a trait may lose its identity and merge with a different category. Excessive leadership may become tyranny and suggestibility could become submission. Absolute separation may not be possible beyond that of an intellectual abstraction (which is what the trait concept is).

Unlike the elementalistic leanings of the psychometricians, the theoretical personality psychologists were trying to come to grips with the individual person as an organic whole. To Prince (1920), for instance, personality was “The integration in one functioning organism, or whole, of all these innate and acquired dispositions with their mechanisms and inherent forces by which they come to play” (p. 406). To Allport (1937), an individual’s personality was “an amazingly complex organization comprising his distinctive habits of thought and expression, his attitudes, traits and interests, and his own peculiar philosophy of life” (p. 24). In defining personality, Drever (1952) considered it to be an ongoing, organized complexity, a dynamic tapestry incorporating physical, mental, social, and moral qualities, natural and acquired habits, impulses, interests, and complexes. More recently, McAdams (2006) has upheld this stance in proclaiming that “Personality psychology is the scientific study of the whole person” (p. 3, emphasis in original). It follows that no test designed to isolate and separate, homogeneous, unitary traits, will tap into that.

WHAT SHOULD CONSISTENCY LOOK LIKE?

When we consider personality in the concrete individual, we have a fluid mélange that is the person-in-sociohistorical context, shifting and transforming, but retaining relative stability. Under such conditions, a consistency coefficient of .3-.4 may actually be rather good evidence of consistency. In fact Funder and Ozer (1983) determined that such a finding had the same explanatory power as the lauded findings of situational influences on behavior (such as Milgram’s, 1975, obedience study, or Darley and Latane’s, 1968, bystander intervention). With all that is concurrently, or potentially, operative in personality, at any particular moment in time and context, that the evidence for consistency is small may simply reflect the ongoing multiplicity of influences. Maybe that is as much as we should have hoped for. In fact, that may be rather good—it still suggests some degree of consistency. As Allport suggested, “unless consistency is sought in the right direction, consistency will not be found” (1937, p. 256). To that I would simply add: “and judged by the right standards,” and those standards may not be those of cross-situational consistency, discriminant or construct validity, nor unitary, isolated traits.

REFERENCES


Holzinger, K.J. (1936). Recent research on unitary mental traits. *Character and Personality, 4*, 335-343.


McDougall, W. (1932). Of the words character and personality. *Character and Personality, 1*, 3-16.


Chapter 37

The resilient disassembled past:
Memory, presence, metonymy, and time

Scott Greer
University of Prince Edward Island, Canada

SUMMARY

This paper reconceptualizes memory as something beyond the head, as residing as unrepresented potentialities in space and time. This approach draws upon the ancient “art of memory,” memory research, and modern literature, notably the works of Proust, where memory is often connected to a sense of place (e.g., involuntary memory). These ideas are combined with Runia’s (2006) concept of “presence”: the way the past exists unrepresented in the present. The experience of presence, such as found in involuntary memory, is the result of a collusion of person, place, and time: a memory emerges but is itself not contained in any of its constituent parts. The theory of presence thus reveals the way being is in-the-world when encoding the past, that the past, rather than being tenuous and ephemeral, can be virtually indestructible, and that memory is not just in the head—it is, paradoxically, bigger than we are.

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. My words echo
Thus, in your mind.
But to what purpose...
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves,
I do not know.
T.S. Eliot, 4 Quartets, No. 1: Burnt Norton

INTRODUCTION

Who are we that we have memory? What does this question mean? Could we even ask such a question without memory? What does it mean that we have memory? This is not a question about a particular memory, such as the recollection of your first love or
Christmas mornings as a child, nor is it inquiring about the capacities and functionality of memory, such as its parameters for encoding, storing, and retrieving the past. What does it mean that we can represent the past to ourselves, to be conscious of time itself? What does it mean for the experience of being human that we have something we call “memory” in the first place? And yet... do we have memory? Is memory like the medieval faculty, some part of the soul or mind, or perhaps memory is a kind of hardware that is uniquely the province of representational systems like brains and computers? We may well be assuming that memory is something that is contained in the head, a part of us like our arms and legs, a part of the “bounded, masterful self” as it were. I am reminded of Heidegger when I phrase the question this way: “Is memory like a cup sitting in the cupboard of our brain?” Or, is memory “in” us like the way we are “in love”—a woven thread in the fabric of our being, not something we have but something much more deeply integrated, something we are. And this leads me to recall Freud, who might well have pointed out, “But isn’t it memory that really has us?”

How do we, today, with all of the professions, industries, and research devoted to the study of memory as a natural kind object, turn to the philosophical questioning of memory? It may not be all that difficult, since, as a somewhat inconvenient truth, we do not really know what memory is. Memory is many things, and clearly has many different forms and processes. As a psychological category, memory has been defined and regarded as something individual and in the head. Today, this very modernist conception of memory continues, and there is a tremendous amount of research on memory that follow this assumption, largely framed within the practices of cognitive psychology, cognitive science, neuropsychology, and cognitive neuroscience.

Cognitive psychology’s and cognitive science’s efforts to confine memory to the laboratory recall Wittgenstein’s pithy critique of psychology as having “experimental methods and conceptual confusion.” In 1982, Ulric Neisser stated—or perhaps understated—that the experimental investigation of memory for the past 100-plus years had been “somewhat disappointing.” Neisser (1982) elaborated:

We have established firm empirical generalizations, but most of them are so obvious that every 10 year old knows them anyway. We have made discoveries, but they are only marginally about memory; in many cases we don’t know what to do with them, and wear them out with endless experimental variations. We have an intellectually impressive group of theories, but history offers little confidence that they will provide any insight into natural behavior. (pp. 11-12)

Neisser pointed out that the experimental approach assumes “memory is memory,” so why not study it in the controlled conditions of a laboratory. Trouble is, context matters. Neisser argued that what is central to the question of memory is looking at how people incorporate and use their past experiences to deal with their lives in the present and in the future. He commented,

In most instances of daily remembering, it is meanings and not surface details that we must recall. Just as the oral historian remembers what happened instead of memorizing some formula of words that describes it, so too we recall the substance of what we heard or read rather than its verbatim form. (Neisser, 1982, p. 16)

Since Neisser’s comments, there has been a substantial body of research that moves the study of memory out of the lab and into naturalistic contexts; this includes work on “situated cognition” (e.g., Robbins & Aydede, 2009), “embodied cognition” (e.g., Valera, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991), the phenomenological study of memory (e.g.,
Casey, 2000), ecological studies of memory (e.g., Cohen & Conway, 2008; Neisser & Fivush, 1993), and research on autobiography and memory (e.g., Davis & Logie, 1993; Rubin, 1995).

Semon’s notion of the memory “engram” and Lashley’s 30-plus year “search for the engram” were early examples of cognitive neuroscience’s attempts to understand how memories are encoded and stored in the brain. Yet, the engram has proven an elusive notion, leading Lashley to conclude that memories are not stored in specific sites in the brain, but are represented holistically or distributed throughout the brain, perhaps involving the coordinated functioning of several areas. Thus, researchers in both psychological and neurological contexts have slowly evolved out of the reified and relatively simple associationistic models with which they began, and have moved towards more naturalistic, holistic, and integrated models of the brain to explain memory functioning. Today, we know that in learning, for instance, neurons will branch out and connect to new parts of the brain. However, as Danziger (2008) notes, explaining the “storage” aspect of memory may be the easy part; how does the memory become meaningful, how do these electro-chemical traces become interpreted, appearing differently in various contexts? What if, in remembering, the brain not only acts as a whole unit, but reaches out to the world, perhaps in some attempt to retrieve or complete part of the past, or perhaps even part of itself? Rather than being just a medium where sensory impressions are made and retained for a time, what if we could show how memory is located in the world—or more specifically, located in the interconnection between being and world? In what follows, I am theorizing memory to be like a skin, a skin of memory: a sensitive, semi-permeable boundary layer between being and world. As beings-in-the-world, we endure and record the passage of time on and through our skin—in our illustrations, our tattoos, and our scars.

SOUVENIERS

If memory is the skin of our being, we are wrapped in it in ways we do not fully comprehend. So busy are we in using memory as a technology, treating our own memories like data, as if it is some resource to be mined to make the world turn, we have forgotten how dependent our memory is upon our connection to the world, to contexts of space and place. People in ancient Greece were well aware of this, as was practiced in the “art of memory.” As Frances Yates (1966) described in her classic book, The Art of Memory, “This art seeks to memorize through a technique of impressing ‘places’ and ‘images’ on memory.” This practice was extremely important during a time when reading and writing had yet to become part of the culture.

The association of memory with space is a mnemonic device known as the “Method of Loci,” in which the content of memories may be ordered and retrieved from an imagined or a drawn or, in some cases, a physically built set of spatial relationships. Clearly, I do not have the space to give full treatment to this ancient art, but it is notable that our well-worn so-called “laws of association” derive from Aristotle and his familiarity with the art of memory. We can see the importance of place, association, and memory in his discussion of “Topics,” where he described the process of assigning items to be remembered to a particular place or category, as well as his writings in “Memory and Reminiscence” in De Anima, which links memory to his general theory of knowledge (Yates, 1966).
However, memory in ancient times was not merely concerned with the retention and production of information, arguments, or speeches. In the Socratic dialogue, *The Phaedrus*, Plato tells the story of the “Judgment of Thamus.” Thamus, King of Egypt, was noted as being a wise king, as understanding his people and knowing what was best for them. Theuth was a philosopher and an inventor, who would often bring forth ideas and proposals of various sorts to Thamus for his judgment as to whether or not this particular idea should be brought before the people. One day Theuth brought “writing” before Thamus; words written down on tablets could be stored, transported, carried, shared, etc. Theuth thought this was a wonderful idea, and a significant advance in terms of extending our memory. After some consideration, Thamus vetoed the idea, telling Theuth that he had not discovered memory—writing is not memory, only reminder, and, more importantly, if people begin to rely on writing instead of their memory, they will become lazy, forgetful, and less vigilant in their pursuit of real knowledge. In time, people will have read many things, and they will become difficult, since they will feel knowledgeable but essentially won’t know what they don’t know. They will not have been provided proper instruction on what is merely the acquisition of information, and they will no longer be open to suggestions because now they believe they have knowledge, but in fact they do not.

Are we guilty of this conflation of information for knowledge today? It most certainly would seem so, for this information age values above all else objective, practical data that can be transmitted efficiently—manuals of “best practices” and so forth abound, for instance. This information may be stored in our computers and other machines... but this is not memory, not what we experience as memory. The irony of this story is that the Latin origin of “machine” [*machina*] means “a trick.” Since, for centuries, movement appeared to be one of the defining features of life, the “trick” here refers to something that moves but is not alive; something that a machine might do. In our technology-saturated culture, we have indeed tricked ourselves into believing it is we who are the machines, because we have forgotten what it means to remember; we have forgotten who we are that we have... that we are memory. As I note this, just take a moment to reflect on how many “prosthetic memory devices”—to borrow Nora’s (1989) pithy phrase—you own or use. And then ask yourself, who am I that I have memory?

Let us turn now to the myth of Mnemosyne: Mnemosyne embodied a far more comprehensive idea than what we mean by “memory.” As a goddess, she is imagined as a divine, active agent, external to human thinking, with a mind and powers of her own. The figure of Mnemosyne combines two things later distinguished in the works of Plato and Aristotle (among others): first, memory as we might think of it now in general terms, as the intellectual capacity which perceives, stores, and retrieves the past; and secondly, she gave birth to the Muses, whom we might associate with “imagination,” and Aristotle thought memory to be much closer to the imagination than the intellect. The mythic image of Mnemosyne begs us to consider the relationship between memory as a relatively static storeroom of events and ideas, and as an active, creative force that shapes who we are and what we do, particularly when it comes to creativity, self-expression, and the way we understand our past. It is on this second sense of memory, something outside of what Philip Cushman refers to as our “bounded, masterful self,” that I want to dwell.
PRESENCE, METONYMY, AND TIME

Based on Greer (2010) and Runia (2006), presence is the way the past exists, unrepresented, in the present. Irony permeates the discussion of presence, for it is itself an ironic notion: presence is a presence-through-absence, where the absence of something denotes its existence. Runia argues that presence is stored in and conveyed by metonymy, one of the linguistic tropes. Metonymy refers to a word or thing that is substituted for another word or thing with which it is associated in some way. We often encounter metonymy when a part of an object, in either a literal or symbolic form, stands for the object itself. In so doing, metonymy usually puts the original object in a slightly different context. Examples of different types of metonymy might include: “The coronary in 204 is going to need a bypass,” “My 2 o’clock is here,” or “Bush invades Iraq.” Metonymy is similar to metaphor in that one thing stands for another, but a metaphor crosses domains and transfers meaning: “my heart’s a big bass drum,” “love is a rose,” etc., and in so doing, a metaphor transforms the object. Metonymy, on the other hand, works more on the basis of contiguity, picking up parts and aspects of a larger context, but staying within its own domain. As such, metonymy performs acts of substitution rather than transformation. And, as suggested by Runia (2006), rather than transferring meaning, metonymy transfers presence: “The coronary in 204 is going to need a bypass”—it is the person (and a certain humanity perhaps) that is lacking, but is at the same time ironically made present. Similarly, the arrival of my “2 o’clock” points to a slot in a daily planner rather than a person. Yet, as with so many interactions we have, it is that which is not pointed to or said—what hangs in absence—that really matters; that is what is conveyed or encountered through presence. Presence denotes the existence of meaning, but in using absence as a marker, it lacks the representational structure to convey meaning. Working through metonymy, presence not only points to something that isn’t there, but representing this absence ironically makes the thing that is absent present.

Metonymy’s essential feature is to present a “change in form” (the meaning of “metonymy”), while at the same time presenting an absence. It achieves this by presenting some aspects of an object or idea but not others. While metaphor operates in the connotative area of language, metonymy is denotative—it is primordial, it is the basic ability to give names to things. Using metonymy, we create a series of signs that substitute for things, and then incorporate these into a discourse about things that exist in the world. Metaphor builds on the initial act of naming through making comparisons with other named things that are not typically associated with the original object: love is a rose, the mind is a computer, the brain is a network. As is well-known, much of the language of psychology involves pointing to parts of human conduct, naming them, and then making comparisons to other socially-relevant objects to describe these in some way; psychology is thus heavily dependant not just upon metaphor, but metonymy as well.

Presence is literally the presenting of the past, but this presenting is outside of memory or even meaning. Presence resides in the absences created by metonymic substitutions, and is itself not represented or representable. As an act of mimesis, following an example by Aristotle, presence can be seen in the way we encounter a picture: the picture presents something, and it says something about that which it is presenting. However, the latter never completely covers the former. The act of presenting is, itself, how presence functions; the world is always present, but parts will
always hang in silence outside of language or representation. This how presence slides through time and history without itself being detected—it exists in the act of making substitutions, in the invisible presentations of the world. Presence exists separate from our stories of the past, although, ironically, it is part of what makes stories themselves possible. Presence is an avatar for oblivion; it is the dark matter of *Dasein.*

Generated in the act of presenting, presence is part of an act that points to meaning, inviting it to a kind of eternal dance. Through our substitutions, using metonymy, we re-invent meanings and the objects themselves eventually. As Runia (2006) notes, presence involves an entwinement of metonymy and metaphor: presence helps to describe the metonymic basis, the shifts in what is presented and represented, while the metaphoric aspects of presence point to how the meanings of the pieces of the past become interpreted over and over, as time and place store and present the world. We might think of this aspect of presence as drawing upon *history’s memory.* While we lack the space to pursue this matter here, history is from the standpoint of presence both continuous and discontinuous; historiographically, presence would suggest that these aspects of time and meaning are wrapped up together. At the very least, this suggests that perhaps we should make hermeneutics a more central part of historiography.

THE EXPERIENCE OF PRESENCE

In applying the theory of presence to the psychology of memory and remembering, we become in a very real and tangible sense how we have lived and been absorbed into the world. Freud once stated that “Immortality is living on in the minds of nameless people.” After our death, our existence, and all that we were, is transferred from our bodies to all of those things that people will remember us by: our smile, our ideas, our mood swings, maybe our terrible fashion sense—like that pair of bright orange pants. In death, our existence becomes defined in terms of our absence, by the metonymic relationships that now stand for and point to who we were. Our “souls” are the sometimes indelible, sometimes flickering memories that linger on in the lives we have touched and in the places we have inhabited. One day these marks in space and time may conjure up something long forgotten and faded with the passage of time.

On the one hand, it is a rather common experience to be reminded of something or someone from long ago by a cue from the environment; in psychology we refer to this as “cued recall.” On the other hand, there are experiences of remembering—such as in post-traumatic stress—that are qualitatively different from a simple memory cue or reminder; the French writer Marcel Proust called these “involuntary memories.”

**Involuntary memory and Moments *Beinheureux***

Marcel Proust is famous for his ideas on memory in *In Search of Lost Time,* where he illustrated through 3500 pages of narrative that memory is so much more than the retention and retrieval of sensory and perceptual information. One of the most famous passages is the narrator’s description of how the taste of “Madeleine” (a type of cookie) dipped in tea brought back many of his childhood memories with tremendous clarity and vividness. In great detail, Proust (1981/1913) described other such instances where sensations in the moment took him back to his past, back to what he referred to as “moments *beinheureux*” (fortunate moments). These “fortunate moments” were experienced through a series of “involuntary memories.” As the term implies,
involuntary memories are memories that are cued by (usually sensory) association rather than a volitional or voluntary recall of information. Unlike voluntary memory, involuntary memories arrive without warning, appearing in response to some contextual cue or connection.

However, as Delacour (2001) and Epstein (2004) both explain, Proust believed that involuntary memory was not just a different type of memory, but was a different experience altogether. According to Epstein (2004), Proust regarded the experience of involuntary memory as something much closer to the actual experience itself, closer to the so-called historical truth. In acts of voluntary memory, we are searching for something; there is goal that directs the flow of memory, and these memories appear as part of our identity and self-concept. Involuntary memories, by contrast, do not appear from an active search, nor do they appear rooted in our familiar sense of self; they come from something outside, appearing as both familiar and unfamiliar. These memories come from what Freud called an “uncanny” place.

Involuntary memories differ from voluntary memories mainly in their emotional power, which is usually completely out of proportion to the trigger sensation. Proust believed the sensations that led to involuntary memory were, themselves, often indifferent to our attention and not particularly powerful. He wrote:

It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it [the past]: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) of which we have no inkling. And it depends on chance whether or not we come upon this object before we ourselves must die.

(1981/1913, pp. 47-48)

As noted by Runia (2006), in so far as involuntary memories carry an unrepresented past into the present, they are one of the clearest examples of presence. Involuntary memories also seem to work on the basis of metonymy, where some sensation or piece of a past, something that is there but not fully represented or remembered, brings about a larger memory. If metonymy is the ferryman of presence, involuntary memory is the river Styx, as it were, that it flows within.

I believe these points reveal some important differences between memory in the individualistic/modernist sense and memory according to the theory of presence: namely, in the way memory is stored and brought about. One might say that we find voluntary memories through the act of recollection, but involuntary memories, through presence, appear to find us. In these cases, it would seem that not only is memory not just in the head, our memory is stored in the world; indeed, our memory is bigger than we are.

THE RESILIENT DISASSEMBLED PAST

If metonymy involves our ability to create part-to-part and part-to-whole relationships and then name them, then what we call “memory” is not just our ability to actualize these relationships in our heads, but the possibility to see ourselves as fundamentally connected to a world in which we are but one part. In a very tangible sense, the world holds the keys to our past, to our sense of identity, to our very being. These ideas lead us to a rather striking conclusion: the whole of memory cannot be thought of as solely situated in the person or just in the head, but found only in our being-in-the-world, in the connections and context of existence itself. In certain cases, we have to “be there” at
a particular place and time, for the past to emerge. It is our “being there”, this re-
connection to place, that gives the experience of presence its embodied meaning, 
vividness, and sense of form and completeness.

We see this type of experience most readily in the case of trauma victims, where, for 
instance, returning to the scene of a serious car accident, or even getting into a car, can 
bring back an intolerable flood of involuntary memories and emotions (Steel & Holmes, 
2007). Rape and its subsequent effects on sexuality, a part of our being soaked in 
sensation, is another dramatic example. What if trauma memory is simply an extreme 
version of how involuntary memory and presence work? Although Runia uses presence 
mainly in terms of cultural history and historiography, we can understand presence in a 
psychological and phenomenological sense as being in touch, literally and figuratively, 
with the world—with the people, places, things, events, and feelings that have made you 
into the person you are.

So, not only is presence deeply paradoxical, it is extremely personal as well, in that 
it points to the absences in our memory and the experiences of presence they conjure. 
We talk about our lives as narratives, about the centrality of meaning in the storied 
nature of existence—but we are broken. Who we are, our memory, is something 
fractured and disassembled in time and space. Through our encounter with the past, we 
weave a narrative cobbled together from the pieces of that past, until we arrive at a 
sense of identity and meaning, however provisional it may be. Our memories, our 
stories, subjectivity itself, they are all to be discontinued, interrupted. Yet, the ironic 
logic of presence provides a way of reconciling this situation: while the past may return 
to us disassembled, the experience of presence can lead us to revise and re-write our 
histories and identities, mending them, strengthening them, whether they are personal or 
social. We may not be able to change the pieces of the past, but we can shape and re-
shape how they fit together.

Understood in terms of presence, our past really is, as Runia claims, “indestructible,” 
because it evolves and survives, in so far as it is relative to and connected with other 
people and the world itself. And if I may be so bold, the future of memory research may 
not lay so much in asking how we will remember the past, but in how the past will 
remembers us.

REFERENCES

Press.
Press.
Press.
Delacour, J. (2001). Proust’s contribution to the psychology of memory: The réminiscences from the 
Cognition, 13, 213-240.
Greer, S. (2010). That day on River Valley and the discovery of presence. Journal of Humanistic 
Psychology, 50, 270-296.


THEORY-INFORMED WAYS OF WORKING IN NEW PRACTICAL CONDITIONS
Chapter 38

‘Learning’—a powerful explanatory concept, or an empty promise of psychology?

Wolfgang Maiers

*Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal and Freie Universität Berlin, Germany*

SUMMARY

Although learning psychology has long formed a central research domain, a deeper understanding of learning in our manifold life practice is still missing. Current handbooks of psychology keep presenting the everlasting store of paradigms despite abundant criticism of their validity: classical and operant conditioning (admittedly with some cognitivist amendments) plus observational learning. This indifference does not follow a loss of the significance of learning, since psychology continues to draw on the explanatory power of this concept. This is dubious however if the presupposition that universal laws cover the heterogeneity of learning in terms of contents, forms and principles is not explicitly justified. In developmental psychology, this condition can be shown as given: no domain-specific learning theoretical accounts for the ontogenesis of particular mental functions, for instance the transition processes of language acquisition, are found. The fatal practical consequence of this deficiency manifests itself, e.g., in early childhood education: Recent German curricula for academic professionalisation focus on the child’s own actor perspective by describing child development as a co-constructive process of self-education. Since the psychological conceptual counterpart—learning—is nowhere put in concrete terms, however, this new view loses much of its power as a guideline for practical innovation.

INTRODUCTION

Learning has formed a central concept and one of the preferred topics within psychology ever since the first or second decade of the last century. Apart from psychophysics, the psychological investigation of verbal learning and of the formation of habits is one of the oldest branches of experimental psychology indeed. The key position of learning theory within the general conceptual systems of psychology follows the idea widely acknowledged in the natural sciences of the mid-19th century that every organism not only phylogenetically but also ontogenetically evolves. That learning as an experience-based adaptive change plays a prominent role in individual development has been a pivotal idea in psychological theorisation ever since. Methodologically, current mainstream psychology bases its self-understanding as an exact science to a large extent on the achievements in the research field of learning. During the hegemony of behaviourism learning attracted an all-absorbing interest so that all other mental phenomena stepped back into the ranks. To put it in exaggerated terms, psychological theory in those days was tantamount to learning theory.

With the cognitive turn during the early sixties, learning was losing its supremacy. Other basic concepts were supplanting it: time-honoured ones such as *memory*, and novel ones such as the paradigmatic notion of *information processing* for example. Since that time learning has appeared to be no longer a matter of basic psychological
concern. While during the so-called *Age of Theory* learning research had led to the contests between some grand unifying formulations, systematic and integrative conceptualisations then faded into the background, and methodical or contentual matters of detail came to the fore, beside them special problems of applying experimental learning psychology to practical concerns in various domains. Seemingly, the issue of learning had been sufficiently settled in the past, so that there was no need for further fundamental clarification.

**REFUTATION OF BEHAVIOURIST LEARNING PSYCHOLOGY**

Scrutinising the state of knowledge closely, however, the conclusion is that a century of research into learning has not really led us to a deeper understanding of how human beings learn in their most diverse practical relatedness to the social and natural world. From a critical perspective it is indisputable that, on the one hand, behaviourist stimulus-response psychology had not approached the problem of (human) learning appropriately, and that, on the other hand, “the modifications and extensions of the traditional systems have not led to significant theoretical progress” (Foppa, 1965, p. 379).

The latter claim consists of several aspects: In *formal* terms, the general theories of behavioural change have missed their own goal of unification and are related to each other in an unclarified state of competition. This concerns the antagonisms between cognitive and S-R theories as well as unsettled controversies within the associationist camp. Moreover, the prevailing theories share a *problem of relevance* in that none of them meets the requirement “to answer the questions which an intelligent nonpsychologist might ask about the sorts of learning which are met in everyday life” (Hilgard, 1966, p. 6).

The defects of the cardinal theories of learning have led to theoretical stagnation. Global conceptions have been replaced by miniature systems trying to minimise the risk of overt failure by limiting their propositions to highly specific (experimental) standard settings of learning tasks. The expectation that a synopsis of such fragments will eventually result in a comprehensive picture is illusory: Not least because in want of criteria of external relevance it remains unclear whether and to what extent the models can possibly provide a useful understanding of the diversity of learning phenomena, or if they are instead restricted in piecemeal fashion to particular kinds and conditions of learning—or even misrepresent learning altogether within the very domains for which they claim validity.

In terms of *content*, the S-R-psychological paradigms were shaken to their very foundations notably from two sides: First, with the advance of cognitive psychology and its key note of information processing a decidedly human-psychological alternative appeared on stage challenging the competence of behaviourist psychology for human learning. Empirical evidence that the effects of conditioning in human beings are not automatically induced by stimulus contiguity or contingencies of reinforcement but, with a few exceptions, manifest only if the subject is *aware* of the fact and the kind of these connections (Brewer, 1974), foiled the strategic fallback position of S-R psychologists that the concepts of conditioning ought to be maintained at least when human learning is not executed as an intentional, conscious process, but takes place implicitly, as incidental learning.
Maybe even more disastrous to S-R psychology was a critical accumulation of experimental data about *behavioural irregularities*, which revitalised the persistent criticism of ethologists regarding the liability of behaviourist concepts of learning even at the subhuman level and hence underpinned their call for elaborating a species-specific taxonomy of learning capacities (e.g., Lorenz, 1965). Laboratory animals repeatedly displayed behaviours which they definitely should not have shown according to the alleged laws of classical or operant conditioning (see, by way of example, Brelant & Brelant, 1961).

As learning, seen from an S-R-theoretical point of view, was identified with *conditioning*, it suggested itself to ascribe such deviations to *non-learnt*, i.e., inherited, determinants of instinctive behaviour. In this vein, Seligman (1970) distinguished between biological *preparedness*, non-preparedness and counter-preparedness for conditioning. Acknowledging the blatant flaws of the behaviourist theory of conditioning and making recourse to the hitherto repudiated ethological concept of instinctive, species-specific behaviour did by no means give rise to a fundamental revision of S-R theoretical basic concepts, but led only to a limitation of their validity claim. Conceding so-called biological constraints left unaffected the doctrine that human psychological concepts of learning be founded by means of animal experimentation.

Learning capacity, as a result of phylogenetic adaptation (and in this sense innate), can however not be adequately understood without knowledge of the behavioural dispositions and the habitat of a particular species. Analogies from other species do not help in finding the biological foundation of human learning in its significant species-specific difference from subhuman learning. Rather one has to track down, in a biological-anthropogenetic investigation of primate and hominid evolution, how specifically human learning dispositions—as the essence of *societal nature*—have emerged in this course. Correspondingly, learning capacity cannot be determined in an abstract-universal world of stimuli, as it depends for its extent and dimensions on the configuration of biological meaning structures in the respective species-specific environment. Due to its physicalistic reduction of the distinctive biological level of specificity, the abstract model of a universal standard organism is utterly unsuitable for analysing animal learning. By implication, the logic of transferring concepts and findings based on restricted settings of animal experimentation to the level of human learning is scientifically untenable.

**THE BEHAVIOURIST MISAPPREHENSION OF HUMAN AGENCY IN A MEANINGFUL WORLD: INDUCTIVE LEARNING**

The common denominator of S-R theoretical notions of universal laws of learning, indiscriminately applicable to human and subhuman organisms across all situations, can be summarised in three postulates: *external determinism*, *associationism*, and *mechanicism*. Learning thus means a modification of the behavioural system ultimately depending on the frequency of the spatio-temporal co-occurrence of initially separate stimuli or of stimulus and behaviour elements (viz., the CS as antecedent of the US, or the reinforcing stimulus as consequence of a particular operand).

Within behaviourist conceptualisations there is a theoretical void with respect to both the *objective meaningful world* and the *subjective agent*. Reality, especially the societal world produced in human history, is composed of experienciable contingent
relationships between discrete singular events into which it has been atomised in the first place. This reduction of complex structures of interrelated natural and social meanings to isolated events which are stochastic in nature is an intrinsic part of the S-R theoretical conceptualisation. Downplaying this as merely technical jargon fails to recognise that referring to a datum as a *stimulus* amounts to considering the supra-individual objectivity only with respect to its immediate effects upon an organism (qua naturalised, objectified substitute for a human agent). Likewise, when using the concept of a *reinforcer*, the most diverse societal meaning relationships are taken into account only under the levelling aspect as to which contingencies of behaviour consequences they involve.

By contrast, one should regard human life activity as a context of *subjectively grounded and intelligible actions*, in which—according to the *criterion of acting reasonably*—premises of situational conditions and personal needs or desires as I perceive them imply specific intentions to act. By adopting this perspective as a foil for reinterpretation, behaviourist statements, taken literally, refer to an individual in a meaning-emptied world who is compelled to infer regularities between coincident or subsequent events and to extrapolate from hitherto experienced event correlations premises of a future intention to act. Holzkamp (1993, p. 58f.) aptly labelled such residual form of understanding *inductive learning*. The impression, received after a sufficient number of repetitions, that the CS is indeed a signal for the occurrence of the US or that the subsequent reinforcement is indeed a product of one’s own acting, is nothing but a result of subjective causal attributions, lacking all insight into a factual relationship between a signal and that which is signalled or into the conditions because of which a certain act is followed by some reinforcement: From the subject’s standpoint the reward just as well as its nonappearance are pure coincidence. Inductive learning can thus be specified as figuring out *random regularities* between sequential events.

Being confronted with isolated data from which one can derive action orientations only by means of an inductive—or, more trenchant, speculative—extraction of premises, probably indicates a border case in everyday life—a transitional stage, where I am temporarily handicapped by a minimal level of information about my action space, which presents itself as a constellation of vague and ambiguous meanings. Under such circumstances I cannot but pay attention to *contingencies* in order to reduce my first uncertainty. The essential learning process is, however, not accomplished by optimising the inductive spotting of regularities, but lies *reasonably* in activities through which I can grasp the given natural and/or social meaning constellations and hence can unchain from the subjection to mere contingencies.

Another serious restriction in S-R theory regarding the human relation to the world concerns the fact that societal conditions of life are not determinants of action in the strict sense, but present generalised action possibilities in relation to which the individual has the option of not acting at all or acting differently. S-R predicates reduce this *possibility relationship* to a *mechanistic determinism*: in view of (given or experimentally induced) environmental contingencies, individuals automatically respond with certain directions of their behavior. Where people *prima facie* behave as conditioning theory predicts, this is indicative of a constellation in which individuals considering their internal state and given circumstances are advised to react according to order. Seen this way, inductive learning appears to be *learning under duress*. The preceding argument assumes that subjective grounds for action ought to be represented in psychological behavioural theories. And indeed: Despite their nomological self-
understanding, conditioning theories implicitly contain, if only in a mystified form, contexts of grounds in which the contingencies of reinforcement—qua premises—prompt the individual to show the theoretically predicted reactions as—relative to the circumstances—most reasonable behavior for one’s own interest.

As long as psychology is run as a science from a third-person standpoint and psychological research is methodologically bound to demonstrating significant correlations between externally controlled conditions (as independent variables) and behaviours/experiences (as dependent variables), learning cannot possibly be conceived other than as forced learning (whatever the theoretical promises are). This means that the standpoint of the learner and his/her genuine life interests in the context of societal action possibilities is absent in traditional theories of learning. Hence S-R theory, even if reformulated in terms of good reasons to act, has nothing to contribute to the problem of the subjective prerequisites for self-determined, motivated learning.

THE STATUS QUO OF LEARNING THEORY—TEXTBOOK LINES

Despite abundant criticism that has convincingly questioned the validity and applicability of the traditional paradigms, the impression is created that the basics are settled. Current expositions of psychology keep presenting, with an amazing indifference, the everlasting store of learning theoretical paradigms: classical and instrumental/operant conditioning plus observational learning/modelling. To date this is the obligatory core in currently circulating textbooks.

Some at least mention the biological and/or cognitivist reservations against the behaviourist explanatory principles (e.g., Bourne & Ekstrand, 2001, p. 135f., p. 151f.; likewise Zimbardo & Gerrig, 2008, p. 200ff., p. 218ff.). More common are tacit interpretations in terms of mediating mental, especially cognitive, processes which break the theoretical frame of S-R psychology: Labeling, for instance, classical conditioning as signal learning involves an extension of the original concept in as much as the conditioned stimulus is thus no longer simply a mechanic trigger of an autonomous reflex, but serves as information about vital events that the organism can take account of in anticipation while orienting himself in his environment. Such interpretative shifts are rarely critically reflected—if the authors do not leave it at an affirmative presentation of the conventional views in the first place.

More sophisticated handbooks of General Psychology (e.g., Spada et al., 1998, 361ff.) admittedly treat in due detail the various adjustments from a biological and/or cognitive point of view. Some even present an expressly cognitivist revision of the former S-R theories in terms of stimulus event- or behavior outcome expectations. Lachnit (2006, 162), for example, relates elementary learning, apart from habituation and sensitization, to “associative learning processes (i.e., classical and instrumental conditioning) which are about recognising and internally representing relations between events”. This definition, which has its origin in the paradigmatic work of Rescorla and Wagner (1972), is also taken as a basis in Walther’s (2006) sketch of conditioning, and in both Kinder’s (2006) and Hammerl’s and Grabitz’s (2006) overviews of learning theories.

Traditionally, classical conditioning is described as an automatic, gradual process of stimulus substitution, i.e. the connecting of preexisting reflex responses to a new stimulus because of its repeated presentation in temporal-spatial contiguity with a natural releaser (US). With the cognitive turn, in contrast, classical conditioning is no
longer treated as a distinct form of learning, but rather as a special case of the general competence to learn predictive relationships between events. The focus is on anticipatory reactions from which an internal representation of a stimulus relation can be inferred. Analogous to the current S-S-approach to classical conditioning, it is assumed that in operant conditioning the expectation of a specific behavioural outcome is the critical factor of learning (R-O-approach). For both approaches temporal contiguity is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for learning event correlations. More importance is attached to the contingency/correlation between the associative elements, i.e. the information which one event (CS, behaviour) provides concerning the appearance of another (UCS, behavioural consequence). 

*Expectation* and *causal attribution* are key concepts in this *rule learning*.

The received view is that in large areas learning can be reduced to the principles of classical and operant conditioning. Only when studying complex learning processes it becomes apparent that mental cognitive representations of organised meaning relationships are at work. From a cognitivist point of view, associations that traditionally account for behavioural change also form cognitive structures, but they cannot be equated with those mental representations constructed and used in the acquisition and restructuring of knowledge and cognitive skills. In order to explain *cognitive learning*, the *information processing approach* has been elaborated as an alternative to conditioning theory (cf. Becker-Carus, 2004, p. 353ff; Bourne & Ekstrand, 2001, p. 172ff, Zimbardo & Gerrig, 2008, p. 225ff).

As the prototype for this complementary autonomous learning process *observational learning (modelling)* is presented. A case in point is Westmeyer (2006, p. 195ff.). He begins by wondering how the variety of social practices, behavioural scripts and knowledge structures are learnt, but he subsequently does not take up the issue again of whether their acquisition implies *different forms and principles of learning*. Instead he follows a widespread presupposition that the paradigm of modelling has the explanatory potential for the full range of complex cognitive-social learning activities. As a matter of fact, starting in the mid-70s, Bandura (1986) made differentiation in his approach in order to provide a coherent theoretical frame for an ever more extensive subject area—at the risk of a conceptual overexpansion, which was not always conducive to the theory’s precision. The key concept of *model* itself offers a typical example case, when it becomes transferred from real persons via symbolic (cinematic, narrated, fictional) models through to ideas, instructions, thoughtforms and other so-called abstract models. Transcending observation, *abstract modelling* encompasses complex cognitive-constructive strategies of information processing and leads to attaining rule knowledge (as, e.g., in the internalisation of moral values). While the modelling approach is receptive, for example, to current memory research (as to learning strategies of repetition, chunking, and elaboration), it is at the same time in need of such extrinsic components. Central theoretical assertions regarding the mental strategies of complex social learning are not elaborated in Bandura’s learning theory, but require substantiation from elsewhere in cognitive psychology in order to achieve the due degree of differentiation and precision.

Practically all current textbooks keep such cognitive theoretical explanations (for text understanding, concept formation, acquisition of mental schemes and scripts and much else) available: in separate sections, under headings such as *memory, knowledge representation, thinking and problem solving*, and treated within different kinds of theories and of methodological approaches—in any case outside the scope of learning
psychology. Cognitive psychological theories are, however, not really interested in the actual genesis of cognitive learning processes, they do not explain the forming of a particular expertise by identifying the respective conditions and activities of its acquisition—instead they commonly focus on performing mental structures.

This means that cognitivism has neither really analysed the old-established problems of learning at a new level nor opened up a new range of phenomena to learning theoretical perspectives, but rather changed the topic or terrain. Lacking true developmental learning perspectives, the performance-oriented information processing models since the sixties have not satisfied expectations for coming to grips with the complexities of cognitive learning, which is characteristic of humans and which the behaviourist theories failed to clarify. The potential significance of cognitive psychology domains for learning psychology, especially with respect to the acquisition of knowledge and cognitive skills, is obvious—but in order to become relevant they need to be integrated and reformulated within a new framework comprehending both implicit, incidental learning processes and intentional learning as a meaningful, situated human practice.

In this effort one faces the challenge of redressing the incapability of traditional psychology to conceptualise the practically mediated relationship between human individuals and their independent, objective world. S-R psychology conceived the world as a world of stimuli only in terms of their immediate effects on organisms. In the wake of the cognitive turn, the whole world including our social reality has become encapsulated in the information processing individual brains and minds, thus vanishing into inner representations: a world-as-coded. In one sense this notion carries the theoretical loss of reality—the objective world and human agency—in traditional psychology even further.

After the cognitive turn, the associationist models of organismic learning activities prevalent in learning psychology on the one hand and the models of information processing in human learning and memory distinctive of cognitive psychology on the other hand have remained completely separate. Meanwhile, contemporary learning psychology presents itself as a kind of mixed theory in which conditioning theory and cognitive theory elements are complementary. In any emphasis different authors prefer, associative and cognitive learning are presented as poles on a continuous scale from simple learning processes that do not require awareness to consciously executed learning activities.

Whenever conditioning is still considered fundamental with respect to the alleged solidity of its principles as well as of its practical applicability as a behavioural technology, the cognitivist critique has ironically been conducive to this success. By reformulating the associationist principles of learning as cognitive processing of stimulus constellations, and, in parallel, separating more complex forms of learning from the learning psychological province, learning research proper has become even further elementarised and at the same time prepared for abstract universalisations: “In all likelihood classical conditioning will come into play whenever one event occurs shortly before another one and thus renders a prediction of the subsequent event possible” (Lachnit, 2006, p. 169f.). Adducing conditioned food aversions, drug tolerance, and conditioned emotional responses as instances—one as closely related to physiological processes as any other—the author abruptly continues: “Even for higher cognitive skills such as inductive reasoning, in particular the learning of causal relations and categorisations, the participation of classical conditioning can be demonstrated.”
(ibid, 170) Similarly Kinder (2006, p. 465) comments: “The view that stimuli are represented in organisms and that expectations play a role in learning was originally conceived in order to account for classical conditioning in animals, however it can also be employed in other areas of learning, not just for operant conditioning, but likewise in human learning such as the understanding of causal relations and categories.”

The critical impetus from the cognitive psychological insight into the awareness of conditioning and from the evolutionary approach of ethology is lost: Instead of generating an interest in the species-specificity of behaviour in general and the specifics of human learning in particular, the cognitivist understanding that “organisms are sensitive to event correlations,” by cutting the connection to behaviour, ends in a new abstract-general model of organismic systems that are thrown back to a passive recording of informational input waiting to be processed. Kinder’s (2006, p. 475) summary of learning theories bodes ill: “The parallels between learning models [i.e. conditioning, WM] and connectionist models [drawing on the traditional learning theories] indicate that the gap between ‘simple’ associative learning and ‘higher’ cognitive processes might be smaller than most have believed.”

The advised bridging amounts to a reductionist mapping of higher level activities onto elementary processes. Instead of generalising abstract-universal laws of learning by taking an analytical bottom-up perspective, a natural-historical reconstruction leading to a taxonomy of infra-human kinds of learning is due. Human learning in its specificity is related to social-historically constituted, meaningful contents and contexts. Categories of such situated learning are to be determined through concrete generalisations of types of active coping with significant learning problems. Only in this course and from the highest level of specificity can be decided whether and how associationist learning processes are included as subsidiary forms. Per se, associative forms of learning, even if cognitively reinterpreted, cannot provide the model for complex human learning.

To distinguish multiple kinds or mechanisms of learning is not a new idea:

Perhaps by using the common name “learning” to cover the acquisition of motor skills, the memorization of a poem, the solving of a geometrical puzzle, and the understanding of a period in history, we are deceiving ourselves by looking for common laws that explain processes that have little in common. … More recently a symposium volume has appeared dealing very largely with this problem of appropriate categories of learning (Melton, 1964), without actually settling the issue. (Hilgard, 1966, p. 12)

Well known is Gagné’s (1965) attempt to define principles or conditions of behaviour modification by starting from an analysis of the dimensions of learning situations and topics. He thus arrived at eight distinct types of human learning—signal learning, stimulus-response-learning, chaining, verbal associations, multiple discriminations, concept formation, rule learning, and problem solving—which he described as consecutive: complex forms rest on simpler forms. Occasional taxonomies in contemporary textbooks do not go beyond classifications such as Gagné’s model of cumulative learning.

By and large the quest for a concrete taxonomy of learning both across the phylogenetic scale and specifically related to typical human learning tasks is is a non-issue. Hence, the rare insight that cognitive human learning is always situated learning (Hammerl & Grabitz 2006, 211) comes to nothing.
THE LEARNING-THEORETICAL VOID IN DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

What consequences arise out of the fact that the problem of an adequate fundamental idea of (human) learning is not recognised or at least not tackled? (With the proviso of a closer inspection, I leave aside recent psychological works, which address the learning problem under headings like self-organised or self-regulated learning and claim to pursue a new form of subject-oriented learning research.) Apparently, a loss of orientation or naive eclecticism prevails in the manifold pedagogical, clinical etc. applications of the concept of learning—with a typical fluctuation between an adaptation of cognitivist views, even though they do not directly deal with learning, and a return to the old S-R theoretical concepts.

This indifference certainly does not result from a loss of significance of the topic of learning. After all, the special competence attributed to psychology is virtually distinguished by its expert knowledge about the processing and lasting effects of personal experience—i.e. learning! And developmental psychologists, for instance, unanimously refer to it as a primary developmental mechanism and central explanatory concept. Likewise, key notions such as the competent infant or the gerontopsychological break with traditional models of age-related mental decline supply evidence for the reality or possibility of life-long learning et cetera. Having said that, it is not necessarily a contradiction to assert that the concept of learning has undergone a depreciation of significance and explanatory power. The statement of life-long learning sounds rather trivial so long as, first, the learning theoretical explanations disregard the variety of developmental phenomena that differ not only in their contents, but maybe also in their respective forms and principles of learning, and if, second, the conceivable presupposition that universal laws cover the heterogeneity of learning is not explicitly justified.

On checking relevant publications on developmental psychology (e.g., Oerter & Montada, 2008; or Berk, 2010), both conditions can be shown as given: Beyond a general reference to the above-mentioned theoretical approaches, no specified learning theoretical explanations are to be found in their representation of the ontogenesis of particular mental functions—suggesting that the same small set of processes is at work in psychological change regardless of the domain or stage of development.

This is exemplified by the multi-layered transition processes of native-language acquisition. To cope with the various thematic learning problems that arise in this connection seems to involve different kinds of domain-specific operative learning principles, which are, at best, partially matched in traditional approaches. This issue is rarely taken up as a research task. After Chomsky’s (1959) convincing criticism of the misguided ambition to ascribe verbal behaviour to shaping procedures, it is now widely assumed that observing and imitating models effects language acquisition. But is this suggestion of a uniform learning mechanism plus general cognitive principles really plausible?

The developmental task of the learning child is of an unequalled complexity (cf. Grimm & Weinert, 2008). For newborns language is at first just a sound sequence. They acquire prosodic competence by discerning differences in tone pitch, loudness and length of vocal utterances and by realising characteristic pauses that indicate phrase endings. Furthermore they learn meaning-sensitive phonemes and regular sound combinations (phonotactic knowledge), enabling them to pick out words in the speech
flow (parsing): Eight-month old babies demonstrably utilise the likelihood of the transition of syllables within and between words for recognising word boundaries. Infants acquire hundreds of words and word meanings as well as the rules of word and sentence composition, that is, they attain a rich lexical-semantic and morphological-syntactic knowledge. Above and beyond this linguistic competence they also gain through verbal interactions the pragmatic competence to employ language appropriate to the communicative purpose and social context.

In order to elucidate the acquisition and mental representation of this body of knowledge, concrete learning psychological analyses of the precursory capacities and the mediating steps in the development, through which the child becomes able to cope with the challenges, are needed. In this way the infant’s repertoire of social-communicative, affective, and cognitive predispositions and, by the same token, the support structure of the social environment must be analysed. In the above example there exists a match between the early childhood sensitivity for rhythmic-prosodic structures and an approachable, enriched child-directed speech that fosters language learning.

Grasping the prosody/phonology of the heard language is an active process of induction in the sense of a discriminative distribution analysis which can be parsimoniously explained as an associationist learning process. In early word acquisition we may similarly assume pair-association learning. Understandably enough, this permits a slow progression only. Having reached the 50-word mark at the age of about 18 months, however, language learning takes on a completely different quality. It is now governed by constraints that render possible a fast mapping between word and meaning. Children at this stage seem to assume that new names (nouns) refer to not yet named, whole objects of the same (i.e., taxonomically, not the matically cognate) category. This wholeness constraint must eventually be overcome, if learning of denotations of properties and parts of objects is to become possible. A mutual exclusivity constraint says that each object can possess only a single term. Accordingly, a child who already knows an object name assumes that a novel word signifies something else in relation to this particular referent. (On this and the constraints that modulate the acquisition of a predicative lexicon and of grammatical rules, see Woodward & Markman, 1998). In other words, the expansive word acquisition, too, is a structure-seeking induction process—however one that cannot possibly be accounted for by associative learning processes. Nor can it be explained by modelling, unless one imputes achievements of an abstract or creative modelling and hence builds on auxiliary constructs, which are not evidence-based. It is necessary, instead, to reconsider the developmental-psychological constraint approach in terms of learning psychology. This elaboration is required, because the strategies of speech comprehension and production in children that can be extracted from the factual course of development describe as if-rules (in no way insightful maxims)—strategies of performance, which should not be mistaken as strategies of acquisition. How such constraints can be conceived as learning mechanisms is not yet clarified (see de Villiers & de Villiers, 1992, p. 372ff.).

THE IMPACT OF THE LEARNING-THEORETICAL INDIFFERENCE ON PRACTICE

The disastrous consequences of the learning-theoretical indifference to practice can be demonstrated by the example of early childhood education: All curricula for the new
type of academic training of nursery-school teachers in Germany indicate a paradigmatic shift in their rejection of an instructionist short circuit between learning and teaching, which has hitherto informed customary professional practice in this field. In contrast to this, child development is described as a co-constructive process of self-education, thus focusing on the child’s own actor perspective. While this is elaborated for various thematic fields of education, the programmatic level is not really exceeded, since the psychological conceptual counterpart—viz. learning—is nowhere put in concrete terms, to say nothing of a theory adopting the generalised viewpoint of the learning subject as a scientific standpoint. Concerning the professionalisation of kindergarten teachers, the new frame consequently loses much of its power as a guideline for practical innovation.

The gap is quite often filled by an abrupt turn to a neuro-scientific level, referring to omnibus concepts like neuro-plasticity etc. It is true, modern neurobiological research has revealed exact physiological and anatomical correlates of learning (e.g., long-term potentiation as a synaptic mechanism). But in what respect does this involve a broadening and deepening of psychology’s theoretical and empirical understanding of learning? Rather it must be feared that in this way the outstanding psychological explication of the impressive capability of infants to appropriate their world in the course of intentional and implicit learning activities is blocked.

This substitution—a blatant, but hardly considered category error within psychological and pedagogical discourses—raises interesting questions in terms of the history and philosophy of science regarding the disempowerment of psychology and pedagogy in relation to the bio-/neuro-sciences—but that is another story for a future paper.

REFERENCES


Chapter 39

Learning and conduct of everyday life and dropout in the Danish VET system

Klaus Nielsen
Aarhus University, Denmark

SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to discuss the theoretical presuppositions in the concept of dropout. It is argued that the majority of research on this area is dominated by a functionalist perspective. Although this perspective claims to be a-theoretical, this is not the case. Interwoven with educational policy and institutional practices, a functionalist approach develops a deficit conception of at-risk students as lacking something (e.g., social competencies, know-how, or self-confidence). As an alternative to a functionalist perspective, an understanding of dropout from a critical psychological perspective will be outlined. In this perspective, the student is fundamentally conceptualized as being active, participating in, and moving across different contexts. The theoretical presupposition of the concept of dropout has significant practical implications for how we understand the problem of dropout and how we develop interventions that try to help more students receive an education.

BACKGROUND

In Denmark, almost 40% of a birth cohort begins vocational education after completing basic school; half of these students do not complete the education they begin. Large-scale quantitative survey studies combined with register data dominates the field of dropout research (Rumberger, 2004a). Most of these large-scale studies have an implicit functionalist presupposition of dropout (Rumberger, 2004b).

The central aim of the paper is to discuss the theoretical implications of our understanding of dropout and to question the theoretical assumption present in a functionalist approach to dropout research and the implications that this approach has for understanding students’ motives and aspirations. In other words, the paper discusses student agency in relation to understanding how and why students drop out of education institutions. This paper was inspired by critical psychology; therefore, the author will argue that, when addressing the phenomena of dropout, we must focus on students’ first-person perspective to understand how the decision to drop out is a part of students’ conduct in everyday life (Dreier, 2003; Holzkamp, 1995). This paper will use examples from an ongoing study researching why so many students in the Danish VET system drop out.

A FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING DROPOUT

The main part of the research literature on dropout is inspired by a functionalist understanding of both educational institutions and how students’ motives are
conceptualized. In general, functionalist thinking strongly influences modern organizational theory, cultural theory (Schein, 1985), institutional theory (Selznick, 1957), and organizational ecology (Hannan & Freeman, 1989). In a functionalist understanding, educational institutions are understood as organic systems. Organizations that are inspired by Darwinian thinking and evolution theory are conceptualized as organic systems that seek equilibrium with the surrounding world (Hernes & Bakken, 2003). Consequently, individuals are analyzed in terms of the functions they perform in helping the organization respond to the environment. Thus, the individual becomes a placeholder in an organization; the individual does not act, but merely functions (Habermas, 1984).

In a functionalist perspective, dropout is perceived as a function of individual, social, and institutional factors; it is implicitly assumed that dropout is a malfunction of the educational system that can be corrected, minimized, or completely eliminated (Nielsen, 2011; Rumberger, 2004a). The research literature typically addresses a number of risk factors (Dekkers & Claassen, 2001). Based on a medical mindset, an understanding of risk factors is constructed within the frame of functionalist tradition designated as special individual or group-related characteristics typical of students or student groups that potentially might drop out (Lee & Burkham, 2003; Nielsen, 2011; Rumberger, 2004a). The functionalist perspective on dropout offers two frameworks for understanding the reason for at-risk dropout behavior: the individual perspective and the social perspective. Both the individual and the social approach to the student-at-risk seem to convey a deficit image of the student. In the individual framework, the problem of dropout is attributed to individual characteristics, such as intelligence and learning attainment as well as self-confidence, aspiration, and motivation. In general, dropout students do not score as well on these variables as students who stay in school (Rumberger, 2004a). The second framework locates the problem of dropping out within the social environment (e.g., families and peer relations related to race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, (dis)ability, and language proficiency) (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009). At the family level, the parents of dropouts are often poorly educated and belong to ethnic minorities. Students who leave school are often from one-parent families or have an unemployed father; material poverty is also a frequent indicator of dropouts. Parents of dropouts, on average, have lower expectations of their children (Lee & Burkham, 2003; Nielsen, 2011; Rumberger, 2004a).

As can be seen from this overview of the main results from conventional functionalist dropout research, students-at-risk seem (among other things) to lack intelligence, learning attainment, self-confidence, aspiration, and motivation. Educational practices of institutions are hardly ever included in functionalist research in any critical manner. The general image of the student who drops out of an educational institution is that of a person who lacks a number of abilities and therefore has significant problems in adapting to school practice. In other words, the at-risk student is depicted as a “loser” who does not have what it takes to make it. The political aim of high retention rates has developed a strong functionalist tradition, creating a deficit image of the at-risk student, through which we learn very little about the students’ motives for leaving school. Political demands, institutional practice, and functionalist tradition shape the deficit stereotype of the at-risk student as somebody who lacks intelligence, self-confidence, and social competencies.

As can be seen from these examples, we learn very little about why students in everyday life drop out of school; however, the students and their differences are being
constructed based on the fact that these students are having a hard time adapting to educational practice.

“VOICED RESEARCH” ON DROPOUT

A number of researchers have been critical of the functionalist perspective on dropout (Fine & Rosenberg, 1993; Lee & Burkham, 2003; Smyth & Hattam, 2002). This perspective sees dropout as a social construction employed to strengthen the belief that education is the path to equal opportunities (Lee & Burkham, 2003). In a class-divided society, race, class, and gender significantly affect economic and social status, and schools are often presented as “great equalizers.” Therefore, schools in general are seen as institutions for selection. The social construction of “losers” legitimizes the choice to not look at schools when studying dropout; instead, we look at the students’ psychological or sociological constituents (Croninger & Lee, 2001). A social constructionist approach to dropout argues that a functionalist perspective on individual risk factors functions as a way of making dropout a result of students’ actions and thus often makes pupils solely responsible for dropout (Lee & Burkham, 2003). In the critical perspective on dropout, there is a strong understanding of dropouts as willing to challenge authorities over a perceived injustice (Smyth & Hattam, 2002); at the same time, they are unwilling to accommodate the social relationships and definitions of knowledge that schools legitimate. In this perspective, dropping out is seen as an act of resistance (Fine & Rosenberg, 1993). From this social constructionist perspective, it is important to analyze and describe how critical voices within schools are being obscured or silenced in educational, psychological, and sociological literature that targets “psychological problems,” “educational deficits,” or “family problems” plagued dropouts (Fine & Rosenberg, 1993). In a critical perspective, the term voiced research is a way of characterizing the bringing to life of perspectives that otherwise would be excluded, muted, or silenced by dominant structures and discourses (Smyth & Hattam, 2002). The basic notion is that continual struggle occurs over whose views get to be represented. Smaller, less audible voices get drowned out by other louder, more dominant, and more epistemologically legitimate voices.

In a voiced perspective on dropout, there is a tendency to understand student voices within the frames of the school context, as resisting the dominant educational regimes. One could argue that students who drop out of schools now are prescribed by the voiced approach as having motives that are in opposition to a functionalist approach. In a functionalist perspective, the students are prescribed to an institutional logic; however, in a voiced perspective, they are prescribed to a resistance perspective. Although the voiced perspective has a strong critical stance toward the dominant functionalist stand in mainstream dropout research, one could question whether this approach provides us with a stronger platform for understanding the reasons why students drop out of the Danish VET system.

MORE THAN VOICES: A PERSPECTIVE FROM CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY AND SITUATED LEARNING

Introducing a situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and critical psychological perspective (Dreier, 2003) on the phenomenon of dropout is in some respects similar to a voiced approach to dropout; however, there are some important differences as well.
As for the similarities, both a situated learning and critical psychological perspective share most of the criticisms of a functionalist perspective. In terms of differences, when addressing dropout from a situated perspective, it is argued that the logic of schooling does not constitute the lives of persons in general. According this perspective, in general, theoretical perspectives on dropout must be informed by an approach in which individuals are not merely understood as people who are part of an institutional practice. Furthermore, people are seen as more than voices resisting the silencing processes in the schools; rather, they are seen as actively doing something with their lives in schools and beyond the school institution. Critical psychology suggests that we shift the focus to how students conduct their lives in a trajectory of participation in and across various social contexts such as the home, school, and workplace (Dreier, 2003). As a person moves from one context to another, his or her position varies, and so does the person’s possibilities, resources, and influence. It therefore takes different personal action potencies to participate in different social contexts, and a person participates in different ways and for different reasons (Dreier, 2003). Faced with this complexity, people must compose and conduct their everyday lives in and across different places in ways that depend on their varying personal scope.

To expand our understanding of how people integrate their activities across contexts, we will take a closer look at the concept of conduct of everyday life (Dreier, 2003; Holzkamp, 1995) as a central tool for conceptualizing students’ motives for dropping-out. Conduct of everyday life can be defined as the process whereby people make active efforts aimed at integrating different activities into a coherent whole; this process is not possible without minor and major conflicts, excuses, or deceptions (Holzkamp, 1995). In other words, subjects actively organize their everyday lives by regulating their activities in various contextual settings. According to Holzkamp (1995), people must establish ways to conduct their everyday lives in relation to the socially arranged rhythms of activities across social time and places. They must develop and make sequences of activities routine to be able to accomplish what must be done. Following this line of thinking, people must come to an understanding with themselves and other co-participants about how to conduct their lives with each other and individually. The ways of living one’s ordinary life include inter-subjective reciprocity with other individuals’ conduct of everyday life (Holzkamp, 1995). This changing complexity of personal lives across life trajectories implies that people must attend to the ways they direct, locate, and prioritize the pursuit of their various personal concerns across time and places (Dreier, 2003). This involves being aware of the distinctions between their participation in different contexts and the various goals they pursue.

From the perspective of critical psychology, dropout is an event happening in one specific context (i.e., the school). The students’ choice to leave school must be understood as a part of how the person conducts his or her activities in various other contextual settings and relates to making sense of one’s specific activities in different contextual settings. People are making a living quite literally in the sense that they actively pursue a specific conduct of everyday life; at the same time, they are making sense of their activities in specific contexts. Their activities are oriented at future participation in different social practice and everyday life outside the vocational school. In this respect, critical psychology offers another understanding of dropout in contrast to the one suggested by a functionalist perspective. In a functionalist perspective, dropout is understood within the framework of the institution; the individual is always being motivated to adapt to institutional practice. The student’s choice to drop out is
understood as a *reaction* to the demands posed by the institution. In most cases, the
student who chooses to drop out is seen as lacking something; the person is described in
deficit terms (i.e., lacking social competencies or cognitive or non-cognitive skills).
Alternatively, a critical psychological perspective on dropout conceptualizes the
person’s being active and emphasizes his or her participation in a number of different
contextual settings. Consequently, when we want to understand why students drop out
of educational institutions, we must focus on the reasons that the students give for
conducting their lives as they do. In other words, rather than focusing on what the
students lack as a consequence of their being affected by the environment, we must
focus on how they participate in different contextual settings and how they manage to
integrate being a student with what they are doing in other contextual settings. To
outline this aspect of how to understand dropout better, some examples from the
interviews conducted with VET students will be given. Before the presentation of the
examples, the methodological consideration of the project will be described briefly.

**METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In Denmark, VET is typically organized around a business program with a 2-year basic
introduction or a technical program with a typical 20 to 60-week basic course. In total,
the typical VET lasts 4 years; in the main course after the basic course, students spend
most of their time in a training location.

This paper is based on 160 interviews with vocational students; 106 students were
interviewed in 2009/1010 when they were taking the basic course in a vocational
school. Fifty-four vocational students were re-interviewed approximately 1 year later.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>64% were male students and 36% female students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>The students were from 15 years of age (1%) to 49 (1%). The main part of the students were from 16-20 years of age (84%) with an average of nearly 19 years of age (18.87).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational background of parents</td>
<td>75% of fathers and 61% of the mothers had a VET-education as highest educational background while 18% of the fathers and 21% of the mothers had elementary school as highest educational background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>13% had another ethnic background than Danish (87%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line of education</td>
<td>27% of the students participated in the commercial college while 73% participated in technical college.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Descriptive Data of the Students Participating in the Interview Study

The students were selected from eight different schools. Individual students were
selected so that a sample representative of students at risk of dropping out and ethnic
minority students as well as representatives of students who do not share these
individual background factors participated in the interviews. For example, women in
educational fields dominated by men, men in educational fields dominated by women,
students who did not live with both biological parents at the age of 15, and students
whose parents have only a very low level of education (i.e., no high college diploma or
basic technical or business education) were included. The first set of interviews focused on the student’s family background, experiences from elementary school, and the student’s motives for choosing this particular education. Furthermore, the students were asked about how they experienced the teaching, the curriculum, the teachers, their peers, and the school environment. Approximately half of the students were re-interviewed. The students who were chosen to be re-interviewed were the students most at-risk of dropping out. The second round of interviews focused on outlining the students’ personal narratives between the first and second interviews, focusing on the decisions that they made in relation to dropping out or staying in education. Verbatim transcriptions of the tapes were made after gaining the approval of the interviewees. An analysis of the transcribed interviews was done using a modified version of a pattern outlined by Giorgi (1983). In this analytical strategy, units of meaning were singled out systematically from the interview texts, based on the themes formulated in the interview guide. When analyzing the interviews, Nvivo9 was used. Patterns within the units of meaning were identified and structured into a unified whole. The quotations used in this article are those that best illustrate the research issues, and all names used are pseudonyms.

EXAMPLES OF THE STUDENTS’ EVERYDAY CONDUCT AND DROP OUT

The following examples demonstrate how the students conduct their everyday lives and how this relates to how they consider dropping out or completing their education. As suggested, the students’ considerations are closely related to their conduct in everyday life. The empirical examples describe how school engagement is closely related to what happens in other contextual settings of the students’ lives. Most of the students interviewed are between 16 and 20 years old and are in middle of a period of social uncertainty and transition. Participation in school is only one part of their conduct of everyday life and, in some cases, not even the most important part. One needs to be careful not to assume that students share teachers, educational managers, or educational policy makers’ educational ambitions.

A number of the VET students interviewed are engaged in contexts outside the VET school. This is where they invest their energy; they are having difficulties integrating these activities with their participation in the school contexts. Some students are struggling to become engaged in school, despite the fact that they are fighting with problems in other contextual settings as well. A number of reasons explain why these students are focusing on what is happening in contextual settings other than the school. The following discussion provides a short account of some of the difficulties that the students are experiencing in balancing their participation in school activities with what is happening in other contextual settings.

One of the central contexts for most of the students in this category is, of course, being with their peers outside school. To engage social activities with peers is central for most of the students; however, some students become more absorbed in the activities of their peers than others. In some cases, the pressure of being part of a particular peer group in which some members are skipping school or unemployed seems to be pulling other students away from school. One of the students attributed his low school achievement to his friends’ coming around and picking him up when he was attending school:
S: It was my friends. They came around all the time.
I: Okay, Okay, so it was difficult for you to concentrate?
S: Yes.

For some of the older students, their families strongly influence their school engagement. In some cases, the students are having problems with their families; these fights impact the students’ school engagement. In other cases, some of the students already have families of their own, which can prevent these students from participating in school-related social activities. The students who have families must also choose an education close to where they live. Conversely, having a family can also enhance students’ school engagement. A female student in her mid-twenties who had dropped out of a number of different schools argued that growing older and having children strengthened her school engagement:

S: I believe that because one has grown older, and now I have the responsibility for two children also, I simply believe that they shall not say when they grow older, “My mother is at home and is doing nothing.”

A number of the students interviewed have a significant substance abuse problem, which makes it difficult for them to be engaged in the VET school. One of the female students trying to become a painter said that half of her class smoked hash in their spare time as well as in school. It was a shared project for a large part of the class. During the breaks, some of students smoked together:

S: It was more like “Do you want to go out and smoke a joint?” and you would go out and find a stupid place to smoke.

One of the consequences of her substance abuse was that she a hard time concentrating: “I couldn’t think straight.” The beginning of the substance abuse problems happened at the same time as she moved with another female student into her own place, away from her parents. Moreover, although it is not described as an addiction problem, a number of the male students seem to be addicted to playing computer games; they play most of the night, which makes them tired and not feel up to participating in class the next day. As these examples show, students are absorbed in the conduct of everyday life, which consumes a significant part of their energy and engagement and makes it difficult for them to participate in school activities.

**INTEGRATING THE STUDENTS’ CONDUCT OF EVERYDAY LIFE**

Dropout is not understood only through academic interest. Dropout has severe implications on how interventions are developed to help the student receive an education. As already outlined, in a functionalist perspective on dropout, students are viewed through the perspective of institutional practice; the at-risk student is conceptualized in deficit terms as lacking something (e.g., self-confidence or intelligence). Following this functionalist logic, interventions tend to focus on how to transmit to at-risk students the skills, competencies, or self-confidence that they apparently lack. (See Rumberger [2004b] for an overview of different kinds of dropout intervention programs.) However, a number of these dropout interventions programs have the unintended effect of stigmatizing the very students that the programs are supposed to help, thereby worsening rather than alleviating the problem (Rumberger, 2004b).

As already mentioned, the decision to drop out is not necessarily linked to particular activities at the school or what the teacher is doing; instead, the decision is closely
linked to the failure to integrate school activities with the students’ conduct in everyday life. The results from interviews show that the central problem for a number of the students seems to be the lack of social and institutional support for the students to coordinate and integrate their conduct of everyday life with school activities. The most successful students at the VET school have friends, family, and an implicit knowledge of how to use various institutional paths to pursue their educational goals.

The dominant discourse at the VET schools is that the students are adults and that they should be able to take care of their lives and organize their own learning process. Fundamentally, this dominant discourse implies that the students themselves must integrate their conduct of everyday life and the school activities. The individual student must be forthcoming about needing professional help from the school. Typically, classes are organized as workshops, in which the teachers give the students assignments and instructions on how to handle the assignment. If the students encounter problems, the students themselves must find and ask for help. This way of organizing the classes is considered by a majority of the VET students as an undemanding and low-structured kind of educational situation. These students have a hard time integrating their activities in their everyday social lives with the activities in the school. In other words, according to the understanding of dropout inspired by critical psychology, it is important to understand the student’s conduct of everyday life and why students have difficulty integrating it with school-related activities. It is important to be critical of the discourse dominating many VET schools and focus more on how ways to support the students. One approach to such a perspective is to redefine the concept of dropout.

**DISCUSSION**

This paper has argued that it is important to discuss the theoretical presuppositions in the concept of dropout. The majority of conventional research about dropout is functionalist and apparently a-theoretical. This paper has argued that the concept of dropout is closely related to institutional practice, where dropout is understood as the students’ reactions to institutional demands, resulting in the dropout student’s being defined in deficit terms as somebody who is lacking something (e.g., social competencies, know-how, or self-confidence). As an alternative to a functionalist perspective, an understanding of dropout from a situated and critical psychological perspective was outlined. It was argued that, in this perspective, the student was fundamentally conceptualized as being active, participating in, and moving across different contexts and integrating his or her participation. Furthermore, in this paper, the author claims that a different understanding of dropout was not only of academic interest, but has large implications for how we understand the problem of dropout and how we approach intervening to enable more students to receive an education. Based on various examples from a research project about dropout in the Danish VET education, it was argued that a number of students did not necessarily lack something; instead, the students had various reasons for experiencing difficulties in integrating their conduct in everyday life and school-based activities. Following this approach to dropout, institutions should focus more on how they can support the students’ integration of their conduct in everyday lives with their activities in school.
REFERENCES


Chapter 40

Expanding the conduct of everyday life concept for psychological media research with children

Niklas Alexander Chimirri
Roskilde University, Denmark

SUMMARY

The concept conduct of everyday life has lately been discussed with regards to how children are engaged with participating in the manifold practices that constitute their daily living. They coordinate their actions with others (adults and children) in order to increasingly influence the conditions they experience in the various contexts they move through. Using the concept of children’s conduct of everyday life calls for analyzing children’s actions across contexts and in relation to others as well as the material arrangements at hand. Based on empirical material drawn from participant observation, the article shows how the concept is fruitful for investigating how kindergarten children use media technologies for conducting their everyday lives in the mutually shared kindergarten practice. Finally, it argues that the concept needs to be expanded in order to comprehensively grasp the intersubjective and material mediatedness of an everyday life with media technologies.

INTRODUCTION

How can psychology conceptually account for the complexity and complicatedness of a child’s everyday life with media technologies? In the Proceedings of the Twelfth Biennial ISTP Conference, Ole Dreier (2009a) advocated a programmatic inclusion of the conduct of everyday life concept in order to grasp the mediatedness of children’s lives. In his contribution, he claims that developmental psychology has failed to acknowledge the significance of how children come to develop a personal conduct of everyday life “in order to come to live as full adult participants in complex arrangements of social practice” (p. 177). He argues that children’s personal preferences processually emerge and change in the course of their childhood in relation to the demands the manifold social and material arrangements pose for actively taking part in them. Children explore and learn from the adults’ conduct of life they are dependent on, and they engage in increasingly expanding their very own possibilities for action across an increasing number of contexts. Nevertheless children’s everyday lives remain unsettled and exploratory in nature—a conduct of everyday life has not “fully formed” (p. 182) yet.

In a paper presented at the ISTP Conference 2009, developmental psychologists Charlotte Højholt and Dorte Kousholt sketch their own understanding of the conduct of everyday life concept and its implications for doing child research. Picking up on Dreier’s notion of how individuals must be understood as participants in social practice (e.g., Dreier, 2008, 2009b), they unfold a distinctive reading of Klaus Holzkamp’s psychological reformulation of the originally sociological concept (Holzkamp, 1995, 2012c). Højholt & Kousholt (2009) focus on how family life can be understood as a
shared practice in which different conducts of everyday life are interwoven with and dependant from each other, and each individual member—including the child—participates in and (co-) creates the conditions for this shared life, thus engaging in making “family life work” (p. 3). Consequently they emphasize the intersubjective dimension inherent to conducting one’s own everyday life and name it a fundamental collective process (p. 1). Methodologically, this calls for investigating the involved family members’ various standpoints and perspectives, which are also mediated via the structural arrangements and the conducts of everyday life of individuals in other daily contexts. By connecting the manifold personal meanings for conditions, realized possibilities for action, and reasons for acting, the researcher may come to learn more about the general (conditions for living) in the particular (ways everyday lives are conducted). Especially conflictual situations point to the variety of meanings and reasons in the social interplay, but also to the generality of dilemmas the participants have to deal with in shared social arrangements. Seen in this light, both adults and children are concerned with ambivalent demands the conditions pose, and are seeking possibilities to overcome dependencies.

The contribution at hand wishes to further elaborate the ideas primarily set forth by Højholt & Kousholt (2009) for mapping my interpretation of Holzkamp’s original work, and for fractifying the conduct of everyday life concept for studying the relationship between children and electronic media technologies. I draw on a phenomena description based on field work protocols, video and audio files from a three-months participant observation in a Berlin kindergarten, so as to argue that also research with children on media technologies needs to be aware that the individual child is engaged with conducting its own everyday life. Using the concept as an analytic tool calls for thinking the human-technology relationship dialectically, rejecting broadly popular, one-sided psychological explanations that tend to reproduce taken-for-granted notions and hypostasize the “child”. It implies looking across contexts and systematically considering the concrete material arrangements in practice as well as the other participants, including the researcher. Living and researching everyday life can thus be conceived as a situated, collaborative task, in which the “child” as well as the “adult” is engaged with overcoming dilemmas that arise out of contradictory structural demands.

THE TWO-SIDEDNESS OF THE EVERYDAY

Conceptualizing children as participants in social practice who are conducting their everyday lives presupposes a dialectical understanding of the human-world relationship. I.e., the human creates its surroundings, the surroundings create the human; the general cannot exist without the particular, the particular cannot exist without the general (Dreier, 2007). The following phenomena description exemplifies the importance of this understanding for doing research on electronic media technologies with children:

Several times I observed how six-year old Peter (pseudonym) wanted to be understood as and called “Sonic” while playing with the other children in the kindergarten. First I was not sure whether he meant the videogame character I still knew from my own youth. The fact that Peter (when asking him about it) referred to “Sonic” as a dog, while the character supposedly represented a (highly stylized, blue) hedgehog, intensified my doubts. However when joining another situation in which Peter wanted to play “Sonic the dog”, another child told him that “Sonic” was supposed to be a hedgehog. Although Peter stuck to his own understanding, he formed a sort of crest
with both hands and budged forward in a ducked position, similar to how the character would do it. Hence I got curious, did a bit of research on the Web, and alas: “Sonic” was still around. Since 1991, it starred in an enormous amount of follow-ups, reissues, and adaptations, also for the hand-held Nintendo DS. I had already learned from the pedagogues that Peter possessed such a game console, and I then found out that he also possessed a “Sonic” game. Furthermore he was aware of an Anime series broadcast on private television starring “Sonic” and his friends as well as the according card game.

I asked Peter why he wanted to be “Sonic”. In at least two situations, he answered that he would like to be “Sonic” because it is always helping its friends, and Peter also wants to help his kindergarten friends. In the observed situations, however, the other children did not accept his “help” and Peter’s role as “helper”, and they did not actively include Peter in the shared activities. One time he was accepted as “Sonic the dog” in a role-playing activity, but not as “Sonic the helper”. In another situation, his insisting on “Sonic” being a dog led to incomprehension on behalf of the other children, and subsequently to Peter being excluded from the activity. The fascination Peter held for this character as well as other characters from videogames and cartoons was obviously not shared by the other children (not by his two years younger brother either). Inter alia this may have contributed to the matter of fact that in my recordings and notes, no child referred to Peter as a “friend”. Furthermore he participated less in shared activities than the other children I focused on. The pedagogues also struggled with comprehending Peter’s interests and actions. Repeatedly occurring “fits of rage” had already led to Peter being diagnosed with having a “disability in the social-emotional area” one year before. Albeit this diagnosis provided the kindergarten institution with means to finance an extra amount of pedagogical care, conflicts between Peter and other children as well as Peter and the pedagogues kept on manifesting themselves. Peter’s mother did not understand why these conflicts persisted. From her perspective, Peter was merely “more sensitive” than other children. When I visited Peter and his mother and brother at home, though, he started a quarrel with his brother which lasted several minutes: The brother was using the charging cable for his Nintendo DS while Peter’s console also needed additional power. The quarrel culminated in Peter hitting his brother, followed by his mother taking Peter’s DS away and imposing a one-week gaming ban on him. Then Peter screamed and flailed around until his mother returned the console to him so that she and I could resume our interview.

The phenomena description offered here could obviously include even more details and situations. Meanwhile, an even more condensed description would consciously neglect important perspectives on Peter’s everyday life with media technologies. These perspectives encompass Peter’s own one as well as the perspectives of those that share a considerable amount of time and contexts with Peter. His conduct of everyday life is at least insofar related to the everyday life of the others, as his described actions are clearly directed towards these (co-) participants in social practice. And the others’ perspectives matter insofar to Peter, as they appear as meaningful conditions for Peter’s premises for action. For instance, wanting to help the other children presupposes that the other children want or even need help. And he needs to somehow relate to the other child’s enunciation that “Sonic” is a hedgehog, and not a dog. What I want to argue for at this stage is that research needs to take into account the perspectives of those concrete others that (co-) constitute the surroundings the particular child takes part in. This implies investigating the perspectives not only of Peter, but also of the children he wants to play with, of the pedagogues as well as the mother (all mediated via the
perspective of the researcher). That is because Peter (the particular child) is dialectically related to the general practice, which in turn cannot be thought of without also considering the other participants in practice. Such a dialectical understanding points to the complexity and complicatedness as well as the mediatedness and worldliness of conducting one’s everyday life.

In contrast to that, the most prevalent psychological approach that studies children in relation to media—the so-called *media effects research* (Giles, 2010)—isolates the interaction between the particular child and the stimulus-providing technology from the everyday surroundings and construes general claims out of this isolated setting. It does not account for the complexity and complicatedness of the mediated everyday life. Like other experimental psychological research, the knowledge it produces is *immediacy-fixated* (Holzkamp, 1983; cf. Dreier, 2007, 2009b). Furthermore, interpretations of the outcomes claim that given a technology-provided stimulus $x$, the child generally does $y$. This cause-effect relationship disregards other influences in the world: it is *unworldly* (Dreier, 2007) or *worldless* (Holzkamp, 2012c). Consequently, explanations deriving from media effects research are *one-sided*, i.e. one thing (usually the technology or a certain use) is probable to lead to something else (usually a change in the child).

That is not to say that the one-sidedness can only be thought in this causal direction: Some (psychological) research claims that it is the child who is the one determining the relationship. For instance interpretations connected to *active* *audience research* (Giles, 2010) often point into that direction. Interestingly, this field also relies on qualitative approaches to conduct its research and considers the child’s surroundings, too. Nevertheless findings suggest that the child can more or less freely choose its use of media technologies (e.g., Buckingham, 2007), without considering that there exist manifold *levels of mediatedness* (Holzkamp, 1995) which influence the *scope of possibilities* (Dreier, 2008) perceived and thus the child’s choice. Reasons for these shortcomings may be found in the conceptualizations of subjectivity in play; but this must be scrutinized elsewhere. For my argument, it is important to retain that research on the child-technology relationship has commonly offered interpretations that do not allow for a two-sided, dialectical understanding of this relationship.

The concrete dilemmas Peter is confronted with in conducting his everyday life, however, clearly emphasize the necessity of thinking the relationship two-sidedly. In many cases, he does not seem to know how to communicate his wishes and needs, his interests, premises and reasons for action to others—although he appeared relatively eloquent to me. He gradually loses his *connectabilities* and consequently his possibilities for participating in the kindergarten practice, and this can only be more thoroughly understood if one considers how this phenomenon is related to and mediated via his explicit wish for participating in the common activities, as well as his choice of becoming “Sonic” so as to help the other children, as well as the pedagogues’ rather fruitless efforts for assisting him, as well as the everyday actions of a mother who also tries to make the complex and complicated everyday family life work. All this, and undoubtedly even more, may need to be considered for assisting Peter in overcoming those dilemmas. The *hanging togetherness* (Dreier, 2007) of Peter’s actions with the others’ actions in relation to concrete conditions in the kindergarten, at home and in between these, can only be grasped dialectically. Instead of looking at how Peter influences his surroundings or vice versa, this needs to be thought of as inextricably intertwined. The relationship between Peter and his surroundings (including media
technologies) is therefore to be understood as objectively determined and subjectively determinable.

**TRANSCONTEXTUALITY OF MEANING AND ACTION**

Critical Psychology is a subject science that starts out from the premise that the human-world relationship is a dialectical one. In principal, a human being can always choose among various possibilities for action and work on changing the given conditions. However, the concrete scope of (imaginable and realizable) possibilities—as I would expand Dreier’s (2008) term—depends on the particular position in society, life experiences made as well as the current state of being and feeling (Lebenslage). The individual subject thus depends on the conditions it encounters and lives with and in, but which in turn_s he can potentially also change. This dependency becomes even more evident when investigating children’s conducts of everyday life (cf. Held, 2010), as the child’s scope of possibilities is necessarily different than the scopes of her/his adult (significant) others.

The subject’s scope for possibilities points here to the meaning side of the conditions. Conditions cannot be grasped by the subject as what they “truly” are, but are always mediated via meanings ascribed to the conditions. Furthermore, which meanings appear to be subjectively functional and sensible, ergo become part of the scope of (potentially realizable) possibilities, depends on the above mentioned position, experience and current state: Certain possibilities “suggest themselves” (liegen nahe) more than other; in the immediate situation, they seem more sensible or plausible than more mediated, more complicated and complex possibilities. From the (always dynamic) scope, then, in particular concrete situations particular premises for action can be deducted (or rather dialectically abducted). Hence the notion that everyday life is conducted: In each and every particular situation, a subject (un_consciously) takes action on the grounds of one’s own scope of possibilities. Without going into the details of how these meaning-making processes are necessarily conceptualized in relation to action (e.g., Holzkamp, 1983), I would like to emphasize how such a perspective implies that conditions must be understood in their specificity and dynamism. In everyday life, conditions do not appear in the form of an overall social structure, but as concrete contexts in which persons take part and action, as Dreier (2009b) points out:

[H]uman subjects do not live their lives in one context or one homogeneous life-world facing an overall social structure. They live their lives by participating in many diverse contexts. These contexts are local settings which are materially and socially arranged in particular ways to allow for the pursuit of particular social practices within and beyond them; they are re-produced and changed by their participants and separated from and linked to other social contexts in a more comprehensive structural nexus of social practice. Accordingly, we must study persons as participants in and across particular contexts. (pp. 195-196)

When relating Dreier’s remarks back to Peter’s dilemmas, it becomes evident how the dilemmas he faced in the concrete kindergarten context are also connected to how he conducts his everyday life in the home context. He knows the “Sonic” character he tried to introduce into the shared activities in the kindergarten from his everyday life in the home context. When presenting my perspective on the observed phenomena to the mother, however, she was surprised that in the kindergarten Peter focused that much on “Sonic”: She reported that at home, “Sonic” is hardly ever mentioned. So on the one
hand, meanings and actions are transferred from one context to another—this is very obvious when these meanings and actions are related to artefacts that are not available in one of the contexts, e.g. particular media technologies in the kindergarten. And on the other hand, meanings and actions related to one context can change quality when transferred into another context—they change according to the (itself ever-changing, dynamic) specificity or particularity of the context as condition.

THE CHILD AS PARTICIPANT AND CONTRIBUTOR

This understanding calls for a psychological approach that researches children (just like other subjects) in and across everyday life contexts—a transcontextual approach that conceptualizes human beings as participants in social research. Various contextual developmental psychologists (Kousholt, 2011) have focused on what happens in the nexuses of a child’s everyday contexts, and how these nexuses are usually ignored in the rather individualizing pedagogical practice of educational institutions. Current discussions revolve around how to methodologically grasp the children’s perspectives (Højholt, 2012; Kousholt, 2011) when doing research. As indicated in relation to the above example, in order to understand Peter as a participant in the shared social practice, or more concretely in the social interplay (ibid.) between various participants in and around the kindergarten context, it is epistemologically necessary to (also) access his perspective on this interplay and the dilemmas arising from that interplay. The knowledge needed to assist him in overcoming his dilemmas can only be produced by gaining an insight into Peter’s wishes and needs, his interests, premises and reasons for action. These insights are crucial for taking the child as a participant in the social world seriously, and for conducting a child research together with children rather than about children (Held, 2010).

So as to gain such insights, the researcher must step into a frame of social self-understanding (Holzkamp, 1983, 1995, 2012c), in which the researched individual is not being researched anymore, but ontologically becomes a co-researcher of the social interplay and the issues at stake. It is the first-person perspectives (Schraube, 2013) of the co-researching participants that alongside the researcher’s perspective shed more light onto the mutually shared social practice. This approach counters the worldlessness of most psychological research practices, as it tries to systematically encompass the social world’s variability and heterogeneity by including the variation of perspectives on and meanings for shared conditions. And it also counters the usual hypostatizing of the participant as the object of research for the purpose of constructing causalities, thus neglecting the (co-) humanness and subjectivity of the participant and excluding her him by definition from the frame of social self-understanding (Holzkamp, 1995).

The discussions around children’s perspectives partly struggle with the epistemological task of making the children in the investigated practice an active part of the research process inside the frame of social self-understanding, as social self-understanding necessitates dialogue between participants on their very own reasons for action (Schraube, 2013). It requires reflecting upon one’s actions and verbalizing these reflections. Evidently this need for verbalization represents a hurdle when it comes to doing research with (very) young subjects. Therefore the researcher is bound to focus more on the concrete individual as well as shared actions and what they are aimed at, or as Højholt (2011) puts it: their personal engagements. She writes:
To understand the personal engagements of a child, we have to look not only at the child itself but also ‘in front’ of the child – what is the child looking at, occupied with, taking part in? Children are like other persons aiming at something, and we must explore their personal reasons related to their engagement in concrete social situations with different things at stake. (p. 75)

Reasons for action are not only approachable verbally: The researcher can also study what the child’s actions are directed towards. For instance, I approached the situations in which Peter wanted to be “Sonic the dog” not because I was following him all day long (that would have probably annoyed both of us), but because I could tell from some distance that Peter was trying to participate in a shared activity, and that he was obviously having trouble. His actions were directed towards the other children, and I did not need to hear their conversation in order to sense that he wanted to participate in and contribute to the activity. Of course listening to them and asking Peter about his reasons for action helped in further understanding the phenomenon (“why Sonic?”; “because he helps his friends”). But I would not even have become part of the situation without looking at the children’s actions and engagements.

The more I got to know Peter, furthermore, the more I came to think that his dilemma of not being able to productively relate to the other children and share activities with them might go beyond what can be grasped via the participation concept: It appeared to trouble him deeply, as if his existence was at stake, as if it was entirely impossible for him to conduct his everyday life without the others. Seen in the light of how Højholt & Kousholt (2009) conceptualized the conduct of everyday life—it being a fundamental collective process—, Peter’s dilemma might very well be considered an existential issue: His own conduct of everyday life is inextricably intertwined with the conducts of others in specific contexts (Holzkamp, 2012c). Conducting one’s own life is connected to expanding one’s own possibilities for action in relation to and with others so as to gradually overcome the objective determinateness of one’s everyday life. Although participating in this “collaborative purposeful transformation of the world” (Stetsenko, 2008, p. 471) is a condicio sine qua non, participation may not sufficiently grasp the significance of human actions as well as the interconnectedness and relatedness of the human-world relationship. According to Stetsenko, it is more precise to instead speak of contribution. Højholt (2011) draws on this suggestion and underlines how “contributing to social practice” may expand the notion of “taking part in social practice”, i.e. contributions “in relation to how we are together here – to the structuring of social life that we are part of” (p. 74). With this conceptual expansion in mind, Peter’s dilemma looms even larger: Not only can he not participate in shared activities; he (temporarily) loses his means to contribute to the social life in the kindergarten, and consequently his possibilities for (shared) action and overcoming dilemmas.

**FOOD FOR CONCEPTUAL THOUGHT**

Understanding the children not only as participants in, but also as contributors to social practice has several consequences for how to do research with children. As already explained, in subject-scientific Critical Psychology they must be considered co-researchers and their perspectives must be taken into account just like any others. On top of that, however, terming them contributors to social practice implies that research findings aiming at structural change may not only be directed at the adults contributing to the practice. The collaborative purposeful transformation must include the children’s
collaboration. Otherwise, research falls back into hypostasizing (Holzkamp, 2012a) the child, conceptualizing him/her at the mercy of adult intervention. That way, the child is again excluded from the frame of social self-understanding; her/his humanness is denied; the child is once again colonized (Holzkamp, 2012b). It is thus important for researchers to direct their suggestions for action not only to the officially responsible adults in practice, but also to the children. They do all contribute to the shared social practice, just as they are all engaged in collectively conducting their everyday lives (such a view differs from Dreier, 2009a; cf. above), and as Peter shows, with trying to overcome their dilemmas. This fundamental human engagement of adults and children goes to such lengths as to question the taken-for-granted child/adult dichotomy, which may legally be sensible, but which also solidifies paternalism, colonizing and hypostasizing the child.

Second, such an understanding not only affects what contributions child research should be aiming for: It also has consequences for how research is conducted and analyzed. After all, doing research is part of the researcher’s conduct of everyday life, and this conduct is interrelated to the other conducts in the investigated social interplay. And of course the researcher, too, participates in (and contributes to) activities and others’ lives, most clearly when being in the field. Interactions with the (co-) researchers actively change the practice. For instance, I presented my perspective on and approach to my fieldwork at a kindergarten staff meeting during the pilot week. Only one day later, one of the more intrigued pedagogues came up to me and said that she was now going to dismantle an old CRT screen with a few interested children, and whether I would like to join them. During that dismantling activity, I already learned that Peter was obviously fascinated by computers, and that he knew a lot about them (e.g., that a screen needs a tower in order to display something). Some weeks later, I actively reminded the pedagogue that she originally wanted to clean the screen’s plastic frame for the children to play with. Placing the cleaned frame into one of the rooms led to a whole range of before unseen activities, such as children “playing” weather forecast. Next to these evident contributions from my side, there were certainly many more. This calls for systematically including a reflection of the researcher’s actions, during fieldwork and beyond.

Finally, subject-science in general needs to focus more on analyzing the concrete possibilities for action/contribution the contributors to social practice realize. I.e., by studying a multiplicity of perspectives on the concrete social and material arrangements across contexts, similar meanings point to collective possibilities for purposefully contributing to and transforming the practice. However, research also needs to look into what possibilities cannot be realized, ergo what limitations for action/contribution are cemented via the given social and material arrangements. The contribution at hand has extensively talked about the intersubjectivity of human action and the conduct of everyday life. What has so far been put on hold is the material dimension, or as Stetsenko (2005) writes: the object-relatedness of human activity. This dimension cannot be thought outside of the social, but certainly needs extra attention, for instance in terms of an (emancipatory, subject-scientific) psychological media research. Such a psychological, socio-material media research could go into an in-depth analysis of what particular media technologies, mediated via the world (other technologies, other subjects etc), specifically mean to Peter, of why they might do so, and what this implies for his scope of possibilities. What can already be assumed on the basis of the above phenomena description, is that the videogame is enacting Peter, but not without being
enacted by him (cf. Højgaard & Søndergaard, 2011): It offers him possibilities for trying to overcome his dilemma, but only if he decides to engage in the game. Nevertheless interacting with the socio-materiality of the videogame also implies limitations: For example, by offering relatively simple, seemingly one-sided control mechanisms, the game plus the console may insinuate that it is rather easy to save one’s friends from whatever evil lurks out there. That this is two-sided and far more complex and complicated becomes manifest in the mutually shared kindergarten practice: Here his help requires meaning negotiation and collaboration. This may contribute to Peter’s frustration. The concrete interaction with the media artefact seems to have been embodied and (unsuccessfully) related to another context; interaction may have become intra-action (Barad, 2003), but it has changed in the process of re-relating it to a different situation.

These broached issues call for a more detailed theoretical elaboration. Without speculating too wildly at this stage, though, it can be concluded that technology is materialized action (Schraube, 2009). The concrete technological artefacts are forms of life (Winner, 1986) that carry (political) meaning: They (co-) constitute the world and one’s own conduct of everyday life. In turn, the artefacts themselves could not exist without being part of someone’s conduct of everyday life. The concept is thus necessary to better understand how and why “children” come to live with media technological artefacts the way they do, and what this implies for developing an emancipatory educational practice that is aware of the socio-material mediatedness of the mutually shared conduct of everyday life in institutional arrangements.

REFERENCES


Højholt, C. (2011). Cooperation between professionals in educational psychology – Children’s specific problems are connected to general dilemmas in relation to taking part. In H. Daniels & M. Hedegaard (Eds.), *Vygotsky and special needs education: Rethinking support for children and schools* (pp. 67-85). London: Continuum.


Chapter 41

Understanding children’s learning as connected to social life

Anja Hvidtfeldt Stanek

University of Southern Denmark

SUMMARY

This paper aims to show the need for theoretical concepts that contribute to the understanding of the dialectic between the common and shared lives of children (their children’s communities) and learning processes in educational institutions. The paper takes its point of departure in the framework of German-Danish Critical Psychology, where the subject is understood in relation to the social world. According to this children are considered to be acting together in communities of practice. The paper presents empirical examples of teaching situations in the first school classes in primary school, analysed from the perspectives of the children. These examples show how disruption in teaching and potential lack of academic learning in the classroom often connects to challenges relating to the children’s social lives, both inside and outside the classroom. The paper makes a contribution to a theoretical discussion by elaborating on the phenomenon of children’s composure for learning as being different from quietness for teaching.

CHILDREN’S COMMUNITIES

This paper is based on an ethnographic study during which I observed a group of children from their last year at kindergarten through their first two school years (Stanek, 2008, 2011). The aim of the study was to examine how children’s social experiences from everyday life in kindergarten influence “how-to-do” practices at the beginning of their school life. In more general terms, it examines the ways in which children as subjects create new communities. This paper draws on results and empirical examples from the study, but the main point here is to argue for the development of theories and concepts that will enable us to grasp the dialectic relationship between the child as a subject with agency and the teaching setting supposedly disturbed (or developed) by this subject.

In Denmark—and probably also in many other countries—there continues to be considerable concern that many children in primary schools disrupt the teaching and that the children themselves are “disrupted” to a degree that makes it impossible for them to concentrate in the classroom and other teaching settings. At present, both “children’s capability to concentrate” and “children’s capability to preserve calm and quiet” in the teaching setting are heavily debated in the public, political and theoretical spheres.

In the past 20 years, PISA results have given rise to stricter demands on the academic levels of the pupils in primary schools. Many intensive interventions aimed at strengthening the reading skills of Danish pupils have been introduced during recent years. But as the academic demands have increased, so has there also been a significant increase in the number of children who are removed from the ordinary schools (and from the statistical reports on ordinary reading skills etc.) through referrals to special
education and special schools. A number of Nordic studies indicate that the reasons for this increase in referrals are a raise in what is described as pupils “socio-emotional difficulties” (Baltzer & Tetler, 2003; Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut, 2007; Persson, 2003; Ron Larsen, 2011).

When “disruption” becomes a concrete issue in the professional work within a school class, the traditional way of coping with the disruption is to focus on a single (or a few) child(ren) by, so to speak, “looking into the child’s head,” or in other words by applying a more or less “clinical” or “psychiatric” perspective. Within ethnographic and special pedagogical research, there has been a stream of critique of the psychomedical way of dealing with disruption in the classroom by relating it to dysfunction in a single child, and thereby neglecting the vital importance of the institutional organization of the school system and the social relations among peers (e.g., Mehan, 1993; Mehan, Hertweck, & Meihls, 1986; Varenne & McDermott, 1998; Willis, 1978). In this paper, I will build on this critique and argue for the necessity of looking at what the children’s heads are “inside of,” hence investigating the social setting within which the child is trying to learn (see also Ron Larsen, 2012).

Learning—from the learner’s perspective

What does this change of perspective from “individual dysfunction” to “dysfunction of the social context” mean, when it comes to analyzing disruption and difficulties in classrooms? Where should we look in order to understand the different difficulties of various children with regards to their participation in the school’s “teaching practice”? Why do these difficulties arise in the first place? What are these difficulties linked to, and how can we best address them? When posing these questions, it becomes relevant and necessary to look at the children’s ways of participating and engaging in the school—from their first-person perspectives (Aronsson et al., 2012; Osterkamp & Schraube, forthcoming; Schraube, 2012). In brief, this means investigating the children’s reasons for taking part in the school’s teaching practice in the ways they do. To understand these reasons, I propose (inspired by the research of Dreier, 1997) that we must take a decentered look at the teaching in which we sometimes find children having difficulties participating in an appropriate manner. Participation in practice means to look beyond the mere teaching task and the teaching itself, towards the children and their common learning practices.

Decentered research practice links to criticism raised by Holzkamp, among others. He argued that the most common psychological approaches to understanding learning presupposes a “short circuit between teaching and learning” (Lehr-Lern-Kurzschluss, Holzkamp, 1995, p. 395). This short circuit describes the general tendency to study learning (and learning difficulties) as a direct consequence of teaching, so that the solution to learning difficulties is constantly sought via new (special education) teaching. For such an approach, the relationship between teaching and learning is construed as an isolated causal relation, and the complex interdependence between the learning processes and the social practice in which learning takes place is generally overlooked. In employing a decented research approach, on the other hand, it becomes relevant to look into the social practice in which learning takes place. Therefore, in order to understand disruption in teaching, learning disturbances and possibilities from the children’s perspectives, we sometimes need to leave the classroom, and follow the children’s trajectories of participation into the communities of children.
As Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger pointed out in their theory of situated learning, learning must be comprehended as an aspect of people’s participation in social practice. Consequently learning cannot be understood solely as the acquisition of individual knowledge. Instead, learning must be understood as being linked to the conditions, possibilities and limitations that are present in specific (learning) contexts—“present” not only as in some immutable fashion, but also as conditions, possibilities and limitations that the participants create together (Højholt, 2012). In this theoretical framework, learning must be understood as the development of participation in specific communities (Lave, 1996, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991). This makes it relevant to look at learning situations from the learner’s perspective, at children’s communities and the concept of participation.

The concept of participation

The concept of participation is a useful and important one when we wish to grasp the complexity of children’s learning processes and the meaning of “Children’s Communities.” The concept directs the attention towards ways of acting and developing on the basis of what context the person is part of and how the person takes part in it (Dreier, 1999; Højholt, 2008; Morin, 2008). The concept of participation allows the research aim to be directed at conceptualizing the individual from his/her personal involvement in a social practice.

The concept of participation is a twofold concept focusing on the context of learning. It comprises the individual’s own active participation, in relation both to learning and to the context in which learning and participation take place.

In teaching practice it is common—in Denmark at least—to be aware of the fact that children are able to learn the most through active participation. Often the twofold meaning of the concept “participation” is overlooked considering pedagogical arrangements, since the focus tends to be solely on ways of insisting on the learner’s own active participation, missing the significance of what children are participating in. The tendency is that the more we care about whether children learn what we want them to learn, the less we look at the contexts they are trying to learn in (Dreier, 1999, p. 78). In the following I will stress the meaning of looking at what the children are participating in by presenting a short version of an analysis from my thesis (Stanek, 2011). I shall now introduce you to a girl whom I have observed from her last year attending kindergarten and throughout her first two years at primary school.

Mary’s participation difficulties

Mary is a child (among 20 others) I have observed from kindergarten through the first two classes of ordinary primary school. Although she is an example of what would be termed a ‘normal’ child, she is nevertheless a girl having difficulties at school. These related both to her participation in the children’s communities, where, while not bullied, she was occasionally excluded, and to her academic progress, in that she lagged behind most of her classmates throughout her first years of school.

In the following, I wish to focus on the connection between Mary’s social difficulties and her learning difficulties. In my analysis, Mary’s ways of participating in the teaching setting are closely related to her possibilities to join in participation among the other children during breaks and in the afternoons at the after-school center. By
observing her participation in these other situations, we also come to an understanding of her participation in the classroom.

Besides studying Mary’s participation in school from both a situated and centered perspective, it seems sensible to dig into her possibilities for participation in children’s communities throughout her institutional history. Mary has spent most of her time at nursery and kindergarten playing with her best friend, and they also attend the same class at school. But very shortly after starting school, Mary’s best friend starts playing with other children than Mary. There is much that could be said about these particular girls and the children’s community in their school class, but the point of departure for the analysis presented in this paper is that Mary, from the very beginning of her time at school, experienced difficulties participating in the social life of her classmates during breaks and at the after-school center.

When in class, Mary seems to be spending a lot of time and attention worrying about her potential play opportunities during the breaks, a lot more than she is spending on keeping up with the teaching. During lessons I observe her negotiating access to play opportunities with the others in the upcoming break instead of listening to the teacher or working on assignments.

As mentioned earlier, it is common, at least in Danish teaching practice, to acknowledge that children are able to learn the most through ‘active participation’ in class. I observed that many of the teacher’s instructions in class were organized to allow the children opportunities to learn through “active participation,” such as instruction in mathematics organized into a number of “maths workshops,” where children can move around in class and play various math games together. In this type of “instructive” organization, Mary spends all her time trying to find someone she can play the math games with. She rarely gets to solve the actual maths assignments.

Three months into second grade, observations show that Mary is excluded from academic development in the class. At the same time Mary’s participation difficulties unfold mostly outside the classroom and therefore rarely disturb the actual teaching practice. On the other hand, some kind of persistent learning disorder seems to be evolving—and my observations indicate that this is a disorder connected to her social life and her participation difficulties among the other children, not a disorder located inside her head. In traditional teaching practice, the teachers will eventually discover Mary’s lack of academic development, but the methods to address the learning difficulties will not impact on the children’s social participation difficulties. From a traditional teaching perspective (building upon the “short circuit” criticized by Holzkamp), it becomes reasonable to consider additional training or particular special educational initiatives to address what may look like “Mary’s learning disorder.”

My analyses show that children’s communities of practice must be included in our perception of what is developing in the classroom. We need to understand the children’s communities of practice as a part of the teachers “conditions for teaching.” Bearing this in mind, we also need to acknowledge that children’s communities are to be regarded as an inseparable part of the context in which both teaching and learning takes place.

**LEARNING COMPOURE VS TEACHING QUIETNESS**

Let us move to another example: A lesson in reading and writing at the beginning of the school year in second grade. I have chosen this example to show how a boy, Michael, participates in the lesson, and how he responds to the academic requirements—and
Additionally to show how his feedback must be understood in relation to his possibilities (and wishes) for participation among his classmates. This example represents the first step in a complex analysis of how life in a classroom develops into different directions for different children (and teachers), each with their individual conditions and reasons. In Michael’s case, we will see how children with an interest in achieving a higher academic level (fast) can become a disruptor. We will see how this disruption seems to be connected to the other children and to Michael’s possibilities for participation in the children’s community.

Although the following provides examples of teaching content and performance, the analysis is directed at the focus of Michael’s preoccupation, and later linked to the preoccupation of the other children.

The class is assembled in front of the blackboard while the teacher, CAROL, introduces the system of letters to the children, red letters (vowels) and blue letters (consonants). Afterwards CAROL asks the pupils to take their seats.

Michael is quickly in place and while he waits for the other children to get seated, he speaks

Michael: “I’m bored, so I might as well look at a book.”

CAROL: “No, Michael, you will not!” Michael has already taken his book out, and several of the other kids do the same. Several of the children are talking to each other while they take their seats. CAROL scolds the children about the noise—she had asked them to sit down in a calm and orderly manner, so she could explain to them what to do when seated. The task is not to read a book, but to read a text CAROL has written—a text about a walk the class went on a few days earlier. Once the text has been read, the children are to draw a picture illustrating the text.

Michael (quietly, but still loud enough for me to hear): “Don’t they think we’ve learned anything at 1st grade?” CAROL does not comment. She hands out the texts to the children, and when Michael gets his, he speaks again.

Michael (mostly to himself): “I will do it, but I’m still bored...”

From Michael’s perspective, the academic requirements are very low. He knows the alphabet, all the letter sounds and the red/blue letters. He has not only been introduced to the alphabet in 1st grade—he has learned it, a fact he is trying to draw attention to in the above example. To him it becomes irrelevant and “like starting from scratch” when his teacher gives him such tasks. Michael’s perspective is by no means the only perspective in the classroom; but on the contrary it is a good example of the need to see the plural form in “children’s perspectives.” There are other kids in the class who seem to appreciate the assignment, and think it is fun to put dots under the vowels. A common comment at this point might be to suggest “teaching differentiation” as the obvious solution to Michael’s disruptive response. But, as shown later, further analysis of the case shows the situation is more complicated than that, and that a “teaching differentiation solution” could be regarded as in line with the “learning-teaching short circuit” criticized by Holzkamp.

Michael is not alone with his perspective, and his remarks are best understood not only as a particular comment directed at CAROL, but also—in a (more) complex manner—towards both the other children in the class and the child community Michael participates in.

From an analytical teacher perspective, the challenge seems partly to be about the tension between getting to know the children and their different skill levels and getting
the children to proceed together in roughly the same academic pace—partly to teach them a specific curriculum and, not least, to teach them that the teacher decides what should be done at what time (Stanek, 2011). For teachers it is a requirement that they keep the class calm and quiet, thus enabling the children to digest the planned curriculum, while ensuring that (more or less) all the children reach an “acceptable” academic level. In this way, academic demands at school seem to link to requirements for quietness (in respect of physical activity and noise level) for teaching (T-quietness) and composure for learning (L-composure) in lessons.

The next and final part of the paper focuses on differences between L-composure (learner’s need for composure for learning) and T-quietness (teacher’s need for quietness for teaching), based on both examples presented so far. The analysis emphasizes how Michael’s “disruption of teaching” can be understood both as an attempt to negotiate ways to achieve the same goals in the classroom the teacher is working towards, and at the same time as part of Michael’s agenda to confirm a children’s community.

The significance of children’s communities to L-composure and T-quietness

In the following the paper elaborates on the concept of children’s composure for learning as being different from teachers needs for quietness for teaching. My research clearly indicates that children do not necessarily achieve L-composure, understood as the kind of calmness they need for academic learning, just because the teacher achieves T-quietness in the classroom. Mary—from the former example—is not course of teaching disruption but she is certainly having difficulties in achieving academically L-composure. It is precisely the point of the above analysis of Mary’s participation difficulties that we must be able to see and understand the children’s communities, and the way Mary experiences difficulties within them, in relation to why Mary does not participate in teaching situations in a fruitful and appropriate way—eventually being able to understand that her poor academic achievement is a consequence of her difficulties with possibilities for participation. T-quietness does not advance Mary’s possibilities for social participation. So, in contrast to what was implied by the causalistic teaching-learning model criticized by Holzkamp, achieving T-quietness does not automatically lead to L-composure. This does not mean that T-quietness is not relevant. It is an important issue—and not only for the teachers. In my material children are sometimes very annoyed when classmates disrupt the class, but, instead of merely focusing on noise in the classroom, we must extend our focus beyond our eagerness to achieve T-quietness to help Mary and other children with obtaining L-composure. When classroom disruption is experienced, it is necessary to look at the children’s reasons for the disruption, including looking elsewhere than merely at the individual child and at ‘the inside’ of the classroom. We need also to look at the children’s communities and how they participate within them both outside and inside the classroom.

In Michael’s case, the disruption is at first glance a criticism of the level of teaching. He is academically bored. The same type of disruption is often seen when children find the academic tasks too difficult. But often the turmoil begins when the kids are preoccupied with something that is important to them, and often something important to their social life among the other children. Michael’s preoccupation with his perception that the teaching (and learning) challenges did not match his level of understanding,
may also be explained in part as a response to potential conflicts in the children’s community.

It is through his preoccupation with the academic work and his “discontent” at the pace of learning that Michael has a special connection with his good old kindergarten-friend, Toby. During first grade, in the after-school center and during breaks, Toby has started to take interest in other activities and things than those he shares with Michael. For instance, Toby appears to be busy playing with some of the girls from class—games Michael does not take part in. But during the school lessons Michael and Toby continue to “meet” through a common interest in academic nerd stuff. What Michael said about the boring teaching in the example presented should not necessarily only be recognized as an attempt to “criticize” or interfere with CAROL’s curriculum, but perhaps more as a “signal” to Toby that “we-agree-about-this-being-too-easy-right!”?

Having an eye for what is at stake for Michael modifies our understanding of Michael as troubled or disruptive—labels we would have to attribute to him from a teacher’s perspective. He is not silent when CAROL asks him to be so, he takes out a book that should not be taken out, and he even gets other children to follow suit. But by being aware of Michael and Toby’s joint project of learning more and faster, we can also be aware of the potential of learning in the children’s communities, both academically and socially. Michael and Toby are surrounded by “aspiring participants”—understood as other children who wish to play with and participate in whatever Michael and Toby participates within. This “aspiration to participation” may help to explain why many other children also take out books when Michael does so.

Michael and Toby are engaging in academic learning in a “contagious” way. They tempt other children to follow their lead. At the same time Michael and Toby invite everyone who is potentially interested in participating in their small reading, writing and maths projects to join them. They become annoyed with children who try to interfere with and obstruct what they think is academically exciting (and this applies both to their own initiatives and to the teachers). Meanwhile they are also responsive to academically relevant comments from other children (and adults), and more than willing to teach other children. One could say that Michael’s disruption or unrest is directed towards, and in line with the school’s academic agenda. Anne Morin (Morin, 2007) shows in her thesis how children can help each other to learn to read (see a similar analysis in Højholt, 2001), and Michael and Toby’s actions confirm this throughout my analyses. By getting close to the concrete everyday lives led by the children in this particular class, it became apparent that these opportunities for learning remain for the most part unused by teachers—whereas the children use them themselves. If there is something the other kids cannot find out about, they often ask Michael or Toby for help, and as the concept of ‘participation aspirants’ suggest, there is a group of kids “champing at the bit” to be allowed to participate in Michael’s and Toby’s academic preoccupation with Michael and Toby. The point is that the way in which the children’s communities develop has significance for how the children encounter their academic tasks at school. If we are to understand children’s potential unrest or disruptive actions in lessons, we need a closer understanding of the children’s preoccupation and engagement to comprehend what the turmoil is all about.

By working directly with children’s communities, it is possible to achieve a win-win; we will both be able to understand why the potential disruption in teaching and lack of composure for learning occurs, and we will be able to use our knowledge about
children’s communities and the children’s possibilities for participation as an “educational advantage.”

**FINAL SUMMARY OF THE PAPER’S ARGUMENTS**

Disruption in teaching and composure for learning must be analyzed as connected to the children’s social life and to their possibilities for participating in children’s communities in relation to the school class. If teachers obtain the T-quietness they want to be able to teach the formal requirements, through finger-wagging and imposing sanctions, the problem that is generating the disruption will rarely be addressed.

When it is quiet in the classroom, teachers can get through with their instructions, but it does not necessarily mean that the children have found the kind of “quietness” and “calm” they need to keep up with the teaching and to learn what was intended by the teacher. This problem is often overlooked, and left for the children to deal with on their own. The achievement of teachers’ need for T-quietness does not necessarily lead to L-composure for the children. It is important not to think of L-composure as a “mental state” to be found inside children’s heads but as a social phenomenon to be found within the communities of practice in which children (and their heads) participate.

Disruption in teaching is not necessarily about children who are badly brought up at home, or about children who cannot meet the academic demands at school. Rather, it is about negotiation and jostling for position in a children’s community. As the example of Mary illustrates, negotiations about positions in children’s communities interfere with the classroom situation in ways that may inhibit conditions for children achieving L-composure in the lessons. This only reinforces the essential point of this paper, namely that we need theoretical concepts that can contribute to informing our understanding of the evident links between learning and possibilities of participation in social communities.

**REFERENCES:**


Chapter 42

Toward a subject-scientific research of counselling

Teemu Suorsa, Antti Rantanen, Matleena Mäenpää & Hannu Soini
University of Oulu, Finland

SUMMARY

In this paper we elaborate a subject-scientific approach to “what counselors think they are doing.” First, we describe the basic elements of subject-scientific research, drawing from the tradition of German Critical Psychology. Next, we describe our education and research project on counseling and articulate a counseling training session as a part of subject-scientific research. Thereafter, we describe the analysis of collected data and give a few examples of preliminary research results. What follows is a developing view on in-service training as a particular way of “doing psychology,” where educational-psychological practice, research and theorizing form a unity that can be characterized as subject-scientific research of counseling. Finally, we highlight some elements of this approach that seem to make it an endeavor worth promoting.

INTRODUCTION

It has become widely accepted that the theoretical orientation of the counselor is not the main factor when it comes to efficacy of psychotherapeutic treatment (cf. Lambert, 1992; Asay & Lambert, 1999). The outcome of the treatment may, however, be qualitatively different in different kinds of therapies (cf. Nilsson et al., 2007). That said, it is not always clear that the reported orientation of the counselor would measure up to its theoretical paragon. For instance, Hollanders and McLeod suggest that the form the eclectic/integrationist approach is “likely to take” by an individual counselor “depends very much on personal choice” (Hollanders & McLeod, 1999, p. 413). Even when it is obvious—also without empirical findings (cf. Smedslund, 1988)—that things beyond counselors’ theoretical orientation are significant for the outcome of the treatment (cf. Dreier, 2008), it is also crucial what the counselor does, how she does it (Rantanen & Soini, under preparation) and what she thinks she is doing (cf. Schneider & Martin, 1992). Accurate measurement of what counselors are doing in counseling sessions is, however, surprisingly rare (Rantanen & Soini, submitted). The same can be said to apply also to accurate research on what counselors think they are doing (Hamer, 1995).

This article elaborates a subject-scientific approach to “what counselors think they are doing.” Due to our research setting, this is done together with the elaboration of a subject-scientific approach on how to grasp scientifically what the client is talking about. First we describe the basic elements of subject-scientific research, drawing from the tradition of German critical psychology. Next we describe our education and research project on counseling and articulate a counseling training session as a part of
subject-scientific research. Thereafter, we describe the analysis of collected data, and give a few examples of preliminary research results. What follows, thus, is a developing view on the in-service training as a particular way of “doing psychology,” where educational-psychological practice, research and theorizing form a unity that can be characterized as subject-scientific research of counseling. Finally we highlight some elements of this approach that seem to make it an endeavor worth promoting.

**ON THE SUBJECT-SCIENTIFIC APPROACH**

In the context of German critical psychology’s project of “overcoming the theoretical indeterminacy of psychology,” Klaus Holzkamp argued that in psychological research it is necessary to differentiate between categorical and theoretical levels of conceptualization. The basic definitions and differentiations of the object of the study are made at the categorical level. Definitions and differentiations that are made at the categorical level also have their methodological implications. At the theoretical level, descriptions are made about the factual realizations of phenomena that are highlighted at the categorical level (Holzkamp, 1983, pp. 511-514).

One of the main categorical differentiations made in the tradition of German critical psychology has to do with the groundedness of human action. Here it suffices to say that this groundedness implies that it is not enough to conceptualize human action and experiences as “responses” or as “response patterns” to a particular “stimulus” or “to a collection of stimuli.” Rather, human action should always be seen as grounded in societally produced circumstances/meaning structures that the individual experiences and reproduces in a particular manner. The experienced circumstances as possibilities for (and obstacles to) action are seen as premises of an individual’s action. An important methodological implication of this societal mediatedness of human action and experiences is that the “subject” is not an “object” of subject-scientific research. Instead, the object of research is the world as the subject experiences it. Thus, the individuals who participate in the research are not seen as something to be researched: rather they are seen as co-researchers who have an interest in clarifying a certain aspect of their life in and through the research (Markard, 2009; Suorsa, 2011).

At a theoretical level, then, descriptions are given concerning the way the categorically highlighted dimensions of the phenomena (groundedness of human action) are realized and concretized in the lives of particular persons in particular contexts at particular times. With relation to the groundedness of human action these theories can, in the subject-scientific research, be given a form of “fabric of grounds” (*Begründungsmuster*) that seek to articulate the subjective functionality of the action and experiences of an individual in certain circumstances from the “standpoint of the subject” (e.g., Holzkamp, 1983, p. 551; Markard, 1993, p. 41).

For example, in her study of the “structural reforms in the social work from the employees’ point of view,” Ulrike Eichinger (2009) presented, as the result of her study, fabrics of grounds (FOGs) in which five general ways of relating to the structural change were articulated. These ways of relating included e.g., the following FOGs: “I have an open and positive stance toward the reform because I think the change might really bring about good things, and/or this way I can avoid some negative consequences”; “I take a critical stance toward the reform so that I can recognize negative developments and, if needed, contribute to improvement of the structures.”
The individual social worker’s way of relating to her circumstances can be seen as an individual variation of thus articulated general way of relating. As Holzkamp (1983, pp. 553-557) points out, the theories concerning the general ways of relating to the circumstances should be seen as possibly unending projects that are subjected to reformulations and specifications in the course of further research with further co-researchers.

TOWARD A SUBJECT-SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH OF COUNSELLING

Our education and research project takes place at the Clinic of Educational Psychology (CEP) at the University of Oulu. Our research group has organized, together with the city of Oulu and other towns nearby, one year in-service training programs in counseling for professionals working in the educational contexts of Oulu and surrounding areas. The training program is part of a nationwide development of structures of public services in pupil and student welfare work that is organized and funded by the Finnish National Board of Education.

The participants of the training program are special educators, psychologists, teachers, principals and other professionals working in educational contexts in the Oulu area. The main purpose of the training program is to help participants to develop their personal way of doing counseling in their everyday work with pupils, their teachers and their parents (see also Soini, Rantanen & Suorsa, 2012).

The training program and a training session

The training begins with a theoretical seminar on counseling. The seminar has typically dealt with prerequisites of professional counseling and with some typical problems within counseling activity. In the halfway of the training program there is another theoretical seminar wherein counseling is viewed from perspectives that seem topical for the participants. For example, in 2011, this seminar dealt with the question of when psychological or psychiatric expertise is needed when solving the problems that children seem to have—and when (and how) it would be appropriate to develop other kind of solutions. At the end of the training year there is a seminar in which participants develop ideas on how to bring their insights concerning counseling to use in their working communities.

The main substance of the training program consists of counseling training sessions within which each participant of a group of six to eight persons takes her turn as a counselor and as a client, while other participants observe (and later comment on) the counseling conversation (Soini, Jämsä, & Kuusisto, 2006). In the main scene of the training session the client presents a topical, unresolved situation that is meaningful to her and that is related to her everyday work. The counselor is given a general instruction according to which it is important to come to know what is it like for the client to be in the situation she is describing: what she thinks, how she feels, and how she has been acting in the situation. The observers are instructed to make observations on the counseling interaction and on the action of the counselor.

After 10 to 15 minutes, the counseling conversation is interrupted by the educator (“supervisor”), who asks the observers their impressions about the interaction between the counselor and the client. The questions the supervisor asks are partly guided by the
theory of “skilled counseling,” informed by research findings that suggests that particular kinds of responses are likely to be beneficial and thus characteristic for skilled counseling. The supervisor might ask e.g., if the observers think that the counselor ignored something important that the client mentioned. The supervisor also aspires to help the observers specify and concretize the comments they make. If the observer says e.g., that “the interaction was good, and the counselor was empathic,” the supervisor might ask on what grounds the observer thought the interaction was good, and what made her think the counselor was empathic. The observers are also asked what they think the counselor was aiming at, and what they think the counselor ought to be aiming at, and why. The discussion with the observers is meant to (1) help the observers to think and observe the counseling interaction from the third-person perspective, (2) help the counselor to specify and reflect upon her action as a counselor and to enhance her understanding of the situation the client is describing and (3) help the client specify and reflect upon the situation she is describing.

After the discussion with the observers, the supervisor gives turn back to the counselor and the client with an instruction that the counselor can make use of the ideas given in the discussion or proceed in other ways she finds reasonable. Thereafter the counseling conversation continues for another 10 to 15 minutes.

When the supervisor interrupts the second part of the counseling conversation, she again asks the observers to comment on the interaction between the counselor and the client, as well as on the action of the counselor. Often there is also a need to ponder together the aspects of the situation that the client brought to the conversation. Most often the participants find it easy to empathize with the client. Even when the particular persons and occurrences are not known to other participants, they often find the described situation familiar in its general features. (This “familiarity” might, of course, be also problematic in getting to know how the situation is from the particular person’s point of view. For the researcher, however, this kind of “agreement” allows a view to what kind of ways of relating to situations, and conceptualizing this relating, are acceptable for “anyone” [Heidegger, 2006/1927] in the group). The supervisor might also encourage the discussion by asking if the participants have similar experiences that were described by the client. Further, the supervisor might ask a more specific question about what the observers think the described situation tells about the circumstances in which the client is working. The observers are also given a chance to give advice to the client.

After the general discussion, the supervisor usually asks the counselor about her reasons for acting in a certain way in the conversation. This question often takes a quite general form, such as “Was there a point in this conversation where you made some kind of decision on how to proceed?” At times the questions are more specific, pointing to a particular response from the counselor (“Can you tell me more about...?”). The counselor might describe, e.g., that she “decided not to go deeper into the anxiety the client mentioned.” The supervisor aspires to further specify and concretize the description given by the counselor. The supervisor’s questions may also include questions such as “Did the conversation go into direction you were aiming at?”, or “What were you hoping to accomplish as a counselor in this conversation?” At times these questions also provoke a group discussion on the counselor’s reasons for doing or not doing something. After going through the stages of a training session, each participant is asked how it was to be in the role of the client/ counselor/ observer. When
the client gives her description, the supervisor usually asks her what will be the next step she will take in the situation she described.

In both spring and fall of a typical year of training there are three training days during which two to three such sessions take place. After three training days and six to eight training sessions, there is a day devoted to feedback and evaluation, during which the peer group is organized to give feedback to each counselor in turn. This is done via seeing a part of the video-recorded counseling conversation that took place in the training session. The instruction given to the feedback highlights the possibility of exploring the counseling interaction from the third-person perspective, from the client’s perspective and from the counselor’s perspective.

According to the feedback given about our training program, the participants all saw these discussions as a welcomed opportunity to share their experiences and conceptions with a group that is both interested in and sensitive to the challenges of everyday work in the educational context. This educational arrangement can also be seen as a long research discussion in which the participants share a common theme of interest (counseling) that they are trying to understand through their actions, observations and conversations in the training sessions.

The situations participants describe in the role of the client are in one way or another topical and meaningful to their work that includes counseling given to pupils, teachers or parents. Thus, the participants’ descriptions illuminate the overall educational context in which the participants are working. This applies also to the descriptions the participants give about their actions as counselor (e.g., the grounds for doing or not doing something are given in a manner that is appropriate in the group). Both from educational and research perspectives it is worth mentioning that the grounds the participants give to their action as counselor become more fine-grained during the training year. To us it seems reasonable to approach the conversations that the participants engage in during the training program by identifying the subjective grounds for action that belong to the given descriptions. Further, it seems reasonable to grasp these subjective grounds for action in their relation to societally produced meaning structures, especially because there is a long-term interest in developing the structures of public service in pupil welfare work.

Reconstructing fabrics of grounds

In the previous section we gave a general description of a typical training session. Next we describe how we have reconstructed fabrics of grounds (FOGs) that belong to the description of action given by an individual participant during the discussions. The training sessions are video-recorded for educational purposes; participants view their own (as well as other participants’) action as counselor on the TV screen twice during the training program. The participants agree for CEP to use the collected material for research purposes.

When researching the experience of the participant who is in the role of the client, it is important to note three steps in the training session: (1) the participant describes a situation that is topical in her work and personally significant to her; (2) the counselor is advised to explore what the client thinks, feels and how she acts in the situation; (3) at the end of the training session the supervisor asks the client what will be her next step in the situation she described.
When researching the experience of the participant who is in the role of the counselor, it is important to note the following steps in the training session: (1) the participant acts as a counselor; (2) the supervisor asks the counselor, (i) how it was to act as a counselor, (ii) what aims she had as a counselor, (iii) how well these aims materialized, (iv) if there was a point in conversation where the counselor made a decision about how to proceed; (3) there is also a free discussion in which participants explore different aspects of counseling conversation.

The first phase in reconstructing FOGs is to write a summary of the situation that the client described and a summary of how the counselor described her action as counselor. As the researcher views the recorded training sessions, she writes down everything the client says about the situation she is describing and everything that the counselor says about her action as counselor.

In the second phase of writing the summary the researcher reorganizes her notes by the topic. This reorganizing is somewhat close to the procedure belonging to “constant comparative method” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) albeit less systematic. The aim is to make the summary logical in the sense that one topic is handled at a time. The overall structure of the summary of the situation the client described goes as follows: (1) the main features of the situation, (2) the participant’s thinking, feeling and acting in the situation, and possibly the grounds for thinking/feeling/acting that way, (3) the intended next step of the participant. The overall structure of the summary of the counselor’s description goes as follows: (1) general description of the conversation, (2) main aims, decisions made and grounds given during the conversation, (3) evaluation of materialization of the aims, and thoughts on what the counselor can learn from this conversation. The summaries are written in the “I-form,” i.e., as if it was written by the participant herself. The words that the participants used in the conversations are kept as such.

Only those parts of the description that are necessary to comprehend what was the main question are included in the final summaries (Suorsa, 2011, p. 206). In the summaries written about the descriptions of the counselor, this has normally not been a problem as the counselor gives her description during a common conversation; thus the descriptions are not as vast as those of the client. In the summaries written about the descriptions of the client, the researcher must sometimes leave aside interesting details that could use an analysis of their own. In the end, the researcher has to reflect upon the description in light of the client’s intended next step: if some part of the description doesn’t have an obvious connection to the next step, it is possible to exclude that part from the summary.

Finally the summaries made by the researcher are presented to the participants. As the participants watch the recorded training session, they are asked to comment on the extent to which the summary made by the researcher is true to their own way of seeing their goals and grounds, and if needed, to correct the summary given to them. Participants are thus involved in conceptualizing the possible ways of relating to the circumstances they have brought up during the discussions.

After getting affirmation from the participants that the researcher has understood them correctly and included the necessary features of the situation and of participants’ “personal stances” (Dreier, 2008) in the summaries, it is safer for the researcher to refine the summaries into FOGs. In 2011 we developed the following heuristic formula for FOGs: “In the circumstance X, I think/feel/act Z, because Y.” Thus, we are able to capture the essential contents of extensive descriptions into a very compact form.
Essentially, in a FOG is identified on the one hand “circumstance X” as it is conceptualized by a participant, and on the other hand an individual way of relating to this circumstance.

What do these conceptualizations then look like? For example, one “circumstance” that has come up in the discussions has to do with behavior or feelings that seem to require expert knowledge. One of the participants, for example, describes a situation in which she

\[\text{was not willing to accept the pathologizing view about an uncontrollably behaving boy that was held by the staff of the day nursery because [she] figured that the boy would be best helped by reorganizing activities in the day nursery so that the personnel could give more individual attention to the boy.}\]

After she realized that the personnel might be describing the boy in extremely negative terms partly because through the diagnosis the day nursery would be entitled to some extra resources, she was even more convinced of her stance that the boy should not be diagnosed.

Another participant described a situation in which she had been troubled by the inability of the city to provide psychiatric treatment to the young that were in need of such treatment. She had

\[\text{participated in pressuring the politicians to ensure psychiatric treatment to all that were in need because [she] figured this would be the best way to make a difference here.}\]

With regard to counseling action, the reconstructed FOGs also articulate stances with reference to psychiatric and psychological expertise. For example, one participant explained that she

\[\text{was not willing to discuss the anxiety the client mentioned because [she] figured that the anxiety would be something that a psychologist would be better able to handle than [her].}\]

After seeing her own action on the screen during the feedback day (and after being confronted with her own intention of avoiding the anxiety of the client) she was quite unsatisfied with her action, and figured further that as a counselor it would be important to let the client decide if she wants to talk about something or not.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

What is, then, the use of articulating such stances in relation to the participants’ everyday work and to their action as counselor during the training sessions? For one thing, these possible ways of relating to different situations give us an idea of what kinds of questions are topical in the educational contexts of the Oulu area. The circumstances that are thus pointed out might also serve as a starting point for further sociological and psychological research that seeks to understand, e.g., the function of such conceptions as ADHD or psychological expertise in the educational context. Thus the possible ways of relating articulated in the FOGs would be seen more clearly as part of a larger picture. It would also be possible to aspire to more fine-grained psychological analyses of the participants’ personal ways of participating in the contexts (Dreier, 2008) they are describing, e.g., by viewing their agency in relation to its “generalizing” or “restrictive” moments (see Markard, 2009). This would, however, require more focused interviews and dialogue with the participants—as well as
participants’ interest in proceeding in the process of subject-scientific research (Suorsa, 2011; Markard, 2009).

We believe, however, that also without further psychological analyses these FOGs help us to identify societally produced meaning structures (from the standpoint of the subject) that are relevant for participants’ work. These indicated meaning structures can then be further analyzed with reference to sociological theories. Also the FOGs that were pointed out in this article can be refined from a variety of sociological perspectives. It should be noted that articulating experiences from the person’s point of view is already a challenging task that cannot be accomplished simply by asking the participant. The psychological researcher should not rush in making conclusions about societal implications of certain experiences—whatever way they are articulated—but hand her results to be debated also in sociological research communities. (Ideally there would be a couple of sociologists in a research group that is conducting a subject-scientific research.) The benefit of articulating experiences as FOGs lies in the fact that FOGs seek to articulate the connection between subjective experience and objective circumstances. FOGs also help us to identify possible individual ways of relating to these circumstances in the way that illuminates the subjective functionality of these ways of relating. The knowledge of individual ways of relating to relevant meaning structures is without a doubt important when aspiring to develop structures that define the work done by (communities of) individual practitioners.

Further, through having a closer look at the discussions in training sessions of about 100 participants overall since 2005, it ought to be possible to identify different kinds of general types of relating to the circumstances that are relevant to successful or unsuccessful pupil welfare work in the Oulu area. And—if we follow Fahl and Markard (1993, p. 15)—the possible ways of relating to these circumstances are potentially relevant everywhere people are working within similar circumstances. Articulating different kinds of successful or unsuccessful ways of relating can also enhance the individual worker’s possibility of relating more consciously to their circumstances, and thus enhance their possibility of participating in maintaining and/or changing the circumstances that are relevant to the outcome of their work.

FOGs might also prove to be beneficial in training “basic counseling skills”: articulating subjective grounds for e.g., not being comfortable with open questions (“I don’t feel like I am supporting the client”) may enhance a counselor’s awareness of her grounds for acting in a certain way and thus enable more sophisticated ways of grounding one’s action. Articulating subjective grounds for counseling action in relation to societally produced meaning structures (like “psychological expertise” that may hinder one from “going deeper” into the anxiety of the client) can also be seen as a step toward appropriating the context of counseling that, according to McLeod and Machin (1999), has been a largely neglected dimension both in counseling training and research. It is also worthwhile to emphasize that the context that the FOGs refer to is not the context as an external “collection of variables”. Rather, the FOGs seek to articulate the societal mediateness of human action (cf. Tolman, 1999).

With regard to “psychological expertise” McLeod has identified similar tendencies in counseling action where practitioners “hesitate to respond to the counseling needs of their service users because they are afraid that they have not had sufficient counseling skills training to be able to handle the situation”. McLeod speaks here (with Ivan Illich) of “deskilling” where “everyday healthcare skills and knowledge are appropriated by professional groups, with the result that ordinary people begin to believe that the only
way that they can be helped is by consulting a professional doctor or nurse, rather than using their own resources”. (McLeod, 2007, p. 27). By articulating FOGs in empirical research, such identifications can be further clarified. This kind of empirical research would also bring to fore that such tendencies should be seen as one possible way of relating to the meaning structures that we live by—implying at the same that there are other tendencies as well.

REFERENCES


Chapter 43

Children in shelters and issues of helplessness: Challenges to the psychoanalytical clinic with children living in shelters in Rio de Janeiro

Sonia Altoe¹, Magali Milene Silva² & Miriam Debieux Rosa³

¹Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
²Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
³Universidade de São Paulo and Pontificia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, Brazil

SUMMARY

This paper reflects on the institutional practices of shelters, namely, the numerous relocations experienced by children and adolescents, through the lens of our clinical psychoanalytic practice. More specifically, the reflections are based on the notion of helplessness as articulated by Freud. Helplessness is inherent in the situation of dependence into which the human baby is born, a state that leads the developing being to construct its psychic apparatus through the dynamic interactions and communications of its relational world. This paper presents selected cases to illustrate how children living in shelters experience this helplessness, and the legal and operational challenges arising from it. We aim to investigate how the situation of social vulnerability, unstable personal relationships, and weak family bonds are related to the concept of helplessness.

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the subjective impact of the frequent moves experienced by children living in shelters through the lens of the Freudian notion of Hilflosigkeit, or helplessness (1895/1996). We intend to analyze both the frequent changes of residence and unsteady or broken relational ties, using this notion of helplessness as delineated by Freud as the structural construction of the psychic apparatus.

We will take the sheltering situation (shelters, social support service agencies, and similar social services) as a central reference, since this is the reality with and in which we work. In reflecting upon these issues we will raise considerations in order to show that the major challenge arising from state intervention is to provide not only adequate physical structure, but a quality of care that allows for the development of the unique subjectivity of children and youth. Thus, we will describe the characteristics of some cases we have come across, establishing relationships between the movement of children and their suffering, while emphasizing some elements of the law intended to protect children and some aspects of institutional operations that do not favor the sheltering of children, teenagers, and adults.

Our reflections take into account information provided by social workers, educators, and other professionals from the shelters, allied with our clinical practice and the follow-up work that we do with children and adolescents.
LEGAL ISSUES

Brazil’s Statute on Children and Adolescents (ECA, 1990) was devised in order to protect the rights specific to both groups, which consist of human beings in an ongoing developmental process. The statute defends the right of a child to be raised in a family, but it also empowers the State to assess cases in which the child should be taken away from the biological family and placed in the custody of a foster family (custody, guardianship, or adoption). This procedure has created standards for the care of children and adolescents, thus creating new specialized institutions to monitor these cases and setting rules as to how shelters should operate. The shelters are collective care institutions where children reside while awaiting placement decisions. However, sheltering may go on for months or years.

Of critical importance is Article 92 of the ECA, which sets out the principles to be followed by the agencies that develop and oversee shelter programs. Some of the guidelines set forth by Article 92 are: (1) preservation of family bonds; (2) integration of the child into a foster family in the absence of resources to remain in the biological family; (3) not separating siblings; and (4) the avoidance, whenever possible, of transferring children and adolescents to other shelters.

The law states that all possibilities for reintegration into the biological family should be exhausted before referral to a foster family. According to Silva (2004), recent research into the characteristics of the country’s shelters indicates that 87% of shelter residents have families (these data are consistent with statistical data taken since the 1960s). This indicates that most children and adolescents living in shelters may be waiting to be reintegrated into their families, which represents an important issue to be dealt with by mental health professionals, especially social workers.

The reintegration process presents many difficulties. The first of these concerns the shelter itself. Placement of a child in a shelter means that the family institution has somehow failed to fulfill its social role. Additionally, it presents the family unit with further difficulties in its role of providing a place in the family genealogy, in what is called the transference of kinship, in order to establish clear and stable family references upon which children can rely as they build their identity (Altoë, 2008). In their everyday work, social workers find that contact with the family is difficult, because those responsible for children may work long shifts, live or work far from home, have few material resources to provide for the child, or—most alarmingly—their bond with their children is “worn out,” and there is little interest in rescuing it.

It is common for those institutions under judicial oversight to suffer from bureaucratic lethargy, which in turn hinders the progress of cases, as shown herein. Often, it takes too long before a decision is made to put the child up for adoption; to complete the adoption process itself; to allow the child visitation with his or her parent(s) on weekends; or to facilitate parental visitation at the institution. Meanwhile, the child remains in the institution, hoping that some adult will decide something about her life, which may take months or years. These delays become incomprehensible to the child, increasing feelings of anger and hopelessness and the incidents of runaway behavior. In addition to the need for greater agility on the part of professionals working in shelters, we must emphasize the role of the judges in the Juvenile Court System and the Elderly in determining the future of these children. A key issue is whether it is essential that these various decisions be made in court: the time it takes to reach decisions has increased considerably due to the backlog of cases and the enormous
number of lawsuits pending in courts. The questions of the time taken up by lawsuit procedures and the child’s emotional state are pressing, and should be taken into account in discussions of actions to defend the child’s interests.

Despite these difficulties, it is essential for the sheltering institution and the family to work in tune. It is worth remembering the importance of complementarity between family and institution. They are not opposed (Altoé, 2008); on the contrary, the human subject cannot be constituted without institutions. Based on Lacan, Di Ciaccia (2005) proposes two justifications for the necessary link between the child and the institution, rooted in the role of language in the development of the subject. The first relates to Lacan’s consideration of language as the raw material for the constitution of human beings, which is the origin of any institutional form. Moreover, language is the very field in which the child is humanized; consequently, we cannot speak of psychic construction without referring to the Other, to the social realm. Likewise, it is essential for the singular construction of the fantasy, which marks an insertion in the field of the Other. In other words, on one hand it is due to language that the child occupies a place in human institutions, and on the other, the same language places the child within the fantasy. In psychoanalysis, “fantasy” refers to a minimal structure that provides a basis from which a symbolic construction of the self and the world proves possible, marking the subject’s position. The aim of analysis is to verify the possible processes and impacts on the fantasy for each subject (Di Ciaccia, 2005).

From this perspective, we will address the emblematic meeting between vulnerable children and adolescents and state institutions, in particular the shelter.

**CLINICAL PROPOSAL AND ITS IMPASSES**

Our research group provides clinical care to children and adolescents in a shelter. The proposal was made by social workers to the coordinators of the Master’s and Doctorate programs in Psychoanalysis, and supported by Professor Sonia Altoé, who after a year and a half joined the Master’s and Doctoral students in this work (Altoé, 2012). This work strengthens an ongoing trend at many Brazilian universities that focuses upon clinics and research.

Clinic services, held once or twice a week according to the psychologist’s availability, are offered by the team which then meets weekly for discussion in the form of supervisions. We work with children and adolescents referred to us by social workers who relay complaints and collect information. In cases in which the family bond is preserved, we also seek to conduct interviews with the family member in charge, who is usually the mother. The clinic services take place at the UERJ Department of Applied Psychology, and are psychoanalytically oriented. As previously stated, psychoanalysis aims to work on the singular construction of the fantasy, and thus does not center on working towards the adaptation of children to social institutions, which would be pedagogical work. Instead, it centers on the construction of, and operation on, the fantasy. This clinic service has both an objective aspect, which concerns these children’s social reality, and a subjective aspect, which relates to how each child works to build his or her psychic reality.

The sheltering of children with socio-family vulnerabilities represents an opportunity to ensure care, protection, education, new bonds, and the development of autonomy for these children. However, the institutional operation of the shelter actually has features that enhance the instability permeating these children’s lives, thus
justifying their continued sheltering. We can distinguish some of these situations in our work with these children: absenteeism due to lack of “educators” (caregivers) or to institutional disorganization; high turnover of caregivers (adults working directly with the children); changes of assigned social workers for institutional reasons; the distribution of children in “houses” within the facility according to age, which leads to separation of siblings; irregular availability of sports activities, leisure, and work training.

However, some particularities emerge in this clinic which operate across several institutions and discourses—State, shelter, family, university, and psychoanalysis.

First, it must be noted that since the service is performed outside the establishment, and since the child is transported outside the regular institutional arrangements (shelter, legal bodies, Guardian Council, etc.), therapeutic work is easier. On the other hand, in operational terms this fact leads to children’s absenteeism from the consultations. The office is within walking distance, which allows adolescents to come on foot, but children under 12 rely on an adult to bring them, which affects the progress of the treatment given that in general the stability of bonds and trust in adults are very much shaken.

We note that the volatility of the references in the shelter brings about increasing insecurity in children as far as the world is concerned. Moreover, it makes up a special feature of the therapeutic work with these patients, and requires therapists’ strong commitment to overcome absenteeism from the sessions, as well as to collect information about the progress of the case in legal and institutional venues.

**CHANGES OF HOUSING, RUPTURE OF EMOTIONAL BONDS AND WAITING TIME**

Below are the social summary data of two cases treated by our team, which characterize the social reality and the difficulty in reconstructing the stories of these children, thus showing the weaknesses of the systems in which they have found themselves embedded (families and institutions). The cases will also illustrate the consequences of the extended time these children spend waiting at the shelter for a solution to be found, and for a new start to their lives.

**Alice**

Alice, sixteen years old, lived with her great-grandmother from birth until the age of two, when her great-grandmother passed away. After that, she lived with her uncles in numerous houses. She was told her mother had died. She has no information about her mother’s family. She states that she suffered physical abuse by her uncles, and was “sexually abused” by a sixteen-year-old uncle. When she was twelve years old, her father returned and she went to live with him and her grandmother. At fourteen she became pregnant by her father. He left the grandmother’s house when the community learned of the pregnancy and the father faced threats. The fact was reported to the Guardian Council and Alice was referred to the shelter when the baby was already six months old. She was referred to therapy because she did not attend properly to the baby’s health and wellness, and the infant weighed only five kilograms one year of age. The intervention of social workers and doctors didn’t seem to improve the situation. In treatment, after a few sessions, she revealed her desire for the baby’s death, but made
the loving and courageous decision to give the infant up for adoption (we learned that after the separation and adoption, the baby quickly gained weight). It took six months of intensive work, and much anguish and pain, in order to understand what was going on with Alice. Therapy also helped her revisit her entrance into adolescence. Then, she ran away from the shelter. This case opened the clinical practice in our research (Altoé & Abrapso, 2007).

**Paulo Joao**

Paulo João is nine years old. Two years ago he was found by a neighbor at Praça XV. He was taken to a police station, and later sent to the shelter. He reported that he lived with his mother, a drug user, and two brothers aged two and seven. An eleven-year-old brother lived with his aunt. His father was in jail. According to Paulo João, the father had tried to “hit his mother with a gun.” He said his mother drank heavily, “got high,” and hit him with a broom and slippers, which left marks on his body. Occasionally “she dropped her kids off in the streets.” A woman, of whom Paulo João was fond, looked after him for a while, but she died. Once he was in shelter, in an effort to find his family the social worker located an aunt who showed some interest in taking responsibility for the child. Next, she contacted his paternal grandfather (who confirmed the stories told by Paulo João and said his son was serving time in prison and confirmed that he had not registered the child officially). However, both eventually gave up on the idea of taking responsibility for the child. In pursuit of these contacts, Paulo João was transferred to another shelter in January 2008. On March 25th 2008, he returned to the current shelter, sent there by Central Carioca de Recepção, for he had fled many times trying to find his grandfather. After the confirmation of his grandfather’s adoption withdrawal, and the lack of success in locating his mother by a search conducted by the “Seeking My Family” program from August 21st, 2007, the social worker forwarded a statement of abandonment and suggested Paulo João’s placement in an adoptive family on May 12th 2008. As of December 2009, he remains in the shelter awaiting a placement decision. In treatment, he experiences extreme difficulty talking about any subject. He states that he does not wish to tell his story, and sometimes expresses his desire to return to the previous shelter in order to locate his grandfather. Other times he wants to stay where he is, or sometimes craves another family. The slow pace of the legal decision—“only the judge knows,” he says—makes any future projects uncertain, and this uncertainty seems to paralyze him. Despite being a clever boy, he is having a great deal of trouble learning how to read and write, and shows little interest in school. Nevertheless, he smiles mischievously and beautifully.

**HELPLESSNESS AND FAMILY**

From the beginning of his work Freud dedicated himself to the study of how a baby becomes humanized and how the psychic apparatus is constructed. In 1895, his text *Project for a Scientific Psychology* formulated the notion of helplessness and assigns it a fundamental role in the psychic structure. Helplessness refers to dependence on another person for self-preservation, as it is exemplified by human infant’s reliance on significant others at birth. The assistance that the infant’s external world provides is not limited to the satisfaction of his or her needs; it introduces the child into the symbolic order, since it requires the communication function.
The situation of total dependency would be intolerable for the child if it continues indefinitely. Toddlers begin to build strategies to circumvent this radical position of helplessness, thereby constituting and developing a psychical apparatus, a human endeavor par excellence. This development includes not being guided by instincts, but “a being and becoming” marked by language and by actively constructing ways of relating to the world. The invention of these modes is what Freud describes as the singular construction of the psyche.

The Oedipus complex is used by Freud (1909/1924) to explain how the psychic organization takes place, and therefore how the construction of the neurotic symptom is constituted: i.e., how each being will construct a narrative about oneself, through the bond with the people who are closest in one’s early years. Through the family romance, staged in the aggressive and loving affections that children direct towards parents, a form of loving relationship with the world is constituted.

Helplessness would thus be a structural element in the construction of the psychic apparatus, indicating a situation of dependence on others. We can say that we are all helpless and our personal story is the construction of possible contours to this unbearable helplessness. Each construction is unique and the elements which are used as building blocks are those that are available in the context of one’s life.

In a 1938 article from the beginning of his work, *Family complexes in the formation of the individual*, Lacan presented some elaborations on the importance of early relationships in building the psychic structure. He reflected on the role of the family in the child’s psychic constitution based on “family complexes.” It is through the complex that the child assimilates cultural diversity: “Among all human groupings, family plays a fundamental role in the transmission of culture” (Lacan, 1938/2003, p. 30), for it is the family that creates psychic continuity between generations. That is, within the first lived relations, in general within the family, the child undergoes structural complexes, receiving the symbolic heritage of her culture through family stories.

The child may be within its nuclear family (parents and siblings), its extended family, or also with other adults with whom it establishes a stable and continued loving relationship. In other words, for its psychic construction to occur, a child must be accepted by another human being, and this construction is based on the first relationships the child establishes. The continuity of these relationships, and any disruptions and loss, can also strengthen or weaken this construction that is beginning. The structural helplessness of every human being requires hosting by another human being, enabling its humanization, its entry into the symbolic order, through language. The context in which this takes place is important but not decisive. However, it is certain that the way individuals can self-describe and narrate their own story is marked by the space they are given by those with whom they interact.

That we are all in a situation of helplessness can be clearly understood by the fact that our personal story is the construction of possible contours for dealing with what is unbearable. Each construction is unique, but each one of them uses elements available in its own context. Psychoanalysis invites the subject to enjoy the symptom and view it as his own desire. By doing so, he will become a subject; and at the same time involve himself in constructing a narrative. In other words, “he will speak based on what he lacks, thus leading to new links with himself and others” (Holk, 2008, p. 24).

Analysis consists of evoking a narrative, but does not restrict itself to the story, addressing as well the position of the subject within the story, as both its author and its product. Discussing her clinic for adolescents living in shelters, Poli (2005) stated that it
has proved necessary to constantly question the effects of the preconditions of the Other in terms of the position the subject occupies in his own narrative. By relating his story, the patient begins not only to produce, but also reproduce the way it is told. The specificity of adolescents’ lives in a sheltering institution involves some peculiarities in the production of the narrative. They are not only the result of the culturally impoverished universe in which they live, but also the result of the change of references due to separation from their families, the fickleness of personal relationships in the shelter, and the stage of their lives. To conclude this brief reflection, we wish to illustrate these difficulties noted by Poli, using an additional fragment of a previously cited case from our research.

Thirteen-year-old Luis’s sessions are predominantly marked by drawings and the use of single and evasive words, often only elicited after lengthy questioning by the analyst. In his sessions, he usually asks to review his previous drawings. He looks at them calmly but rarely makes any comment. Nevertheless, it seems important to him to review them, so that he can rescue a narrative thread of his story in his transference with the analyst. In one session, after a long period without treatment, which could have incited in him the fantasy of abandonment, he drew a sailboat. When requested to speak about the boat, he replied: “It is an abandoned boat; it has no story.” By giving voice to this statement, he seems to summarize his difficulty, observed throughout treatment, in weaving together the elements needed to build a personal and family story which would enable him to construct his existence as a subject with more consistency and richness. Perhaps this is the case—it is in fact the assumption raised in this research—because of the relationship between the fundamental helplessness and social helplessness (familial, institutional) that arises during childhood, as is the case for Luis and most of the children considered herein.

Importantly, this research work, which incorporates clinical care in its methodology, involves a specific social reality, which leads us to an ethical position with political implications. Accordingly, in reporting the cases treated, we consider it important to contextualize the situation of life in which children and adolescents are placed, including the institutional implications that permeate their lives. Thus, we cannot refrain from intervening with social workers and also from making considerations about the public policy of care to this population of children and adolescents and its relation to legal institutions.

REFERENCES


Chapter 44

Psy/legal interfaces in the field of youth in conflict with the law: Assessment and proposals for new forms of intervention

Maria Cristina G. Vicentin¹, Miriam Debieux Rosa² & Gabriela Gramkow³

¹Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, Brazil
²Universidade de São Paulo, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, Brazil
³Centro Universitário São Camilo, Brazil

SUMMARY

This work demonstrates how, in Brazil, the social demand to “control” juvenile crime has led to growing criminalization processes and the pathologization of adolescents in conflict with the law. In the territory of pathologization or medicalization, it detects a growing use of the “psy” apparatus in the management of youth sectors in conflict with the law. One of the aspects of the pathologization is the increasing use of diagnostics of antisocial personality disorders (APD) indicating that these teenagers have become characterized by their supposed aggressiveness. The predominance of psy practices in the management and control of youth conflicts surfaces in the social field, thereby preventing a decisive reading of the social phenomena of exclusion and vulnerability, while configuring an important strategy of power. We propose an ethical-political agenda for psy professionals within Latin America, one strategically oriented toward the attainment of human rights or, at least, the reduction of their violations.

PSY-LEGAL INTERFACES IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW

This paper aims to contextualize the situation of juvenile offenders in Brazil with regard to the assignment of mental health care as a corrective socio-educational measure. In accordance with the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, Law nº 8069, July 13 1990, socio-educational measures are applied to adolescents between twelve and eighteen years old who have committed one or more acts described in Brazil’s penal code as a crime or misdemeanor. The applicable measures are, in increasing order of severity: admonition, obligation to make reparations for damages, community service, probation, semi-liberty, and internment (Statute of the Child and Adolescent, 1990). Since this is a problematic field, in which innumerable tensions emerge, in addition to introducing the legal framework that governs this interface, we will also touch on its context and the main challenges involved in the relation between the juvenile justice system and the mental health system.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Brazil faces high rates of violence and crime. Nevertheless, these numbers do not affect everyone in the population in the same way: young people from twelve to twenty-nine years old, who represent 35% of the Brazilian population, are both the main victims and main perpetrators of violent acts. Only a few studies analyze the demographics of
infractions committed in Brazil. In the penitentiary system, it appears that over half of
the prisoners are young adults up to twenty-nine years old. A survey conducted by the
National Secretariat of Public Safety (SENASP) based on incidents registered by the
Civil Police points out that the adolescents are the perpetrators of about 10% of the
homicides, robberies, drug trafficking crimes, and rapes; 6% of personal injuries and
8% of extortions through kidnapping (Ministério da Justiça, 2006).

The violence is selective in its victimization and particularly affects young black
people who live in the peripheral areas of large cities, have little education, and are in
high-risk social situations. Adolescents, inserted in this context of violence, have many
of their human rights impugned and experience a process of progressive exclusion
which culminates, when they commit an offense, with entry into the justice system. A
survey conducted by Datafolha, in 2009, concluded that over a third of Brazilian
adolescents and young people are constantly exposed to violence in their daily life
(Ministério da Justiça et al., 2009). With the redemocratization of the country in the
1980s, the promulgation of a new federal constitution in 1988 introduced a judicial and
social conscience in the Brazilian legal order that recognizes children and adolescents as
citizens with full rights, with responsibility given to the State, the family, and society to
guarantee their rights with absolute priority. Art. 227 reads:

It is the duty of the family, society and the State to assure with absolute
priority the rights of children and adolescents to life, health, food, education,
leisure, occupational training, culture, dignity, respect, freedom, and family and
community life, and in addition to protect them from all forms of negligence,
discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty and oppression. (Constituição
Federal, 1988)

In this regard, one of the conclusions drawn by the study Map of Violence in Brazil
2011 indicates that the rates of youth victimization by homicide are abnormally high
compared to international standards. Proportionally, there are today two and a half times
more homicides of young people (aged fifteen to twenty-four) than people out of this
age range, from which we can conclude that the increase in violence in Brazil has youth
as its major target, and that the rates increasingly grow. Between the ages twelve and
fifteen, each additional year of life almost doubles the number of homicides and
homicide rates (Waiselfisz, 2011).

As it specifically concerns involvement with illegal conduct, the ECA creates a
special system of accountability for adolescents (between twelve and eighteen years
old), taking into account the principle of their particular condition of development (art.
227, par. 3, clause V of the Federal Constitution and art.121 of the ECA). The 1988
Constitution envisions, in its article 228, the impunity of persons under eighteen years
of age, i.e., if a person under eighteen commits an act that is considered a crime or
misdemeanor (an infraction), he or she should be held accountable in accordance with
the provisions of the ECA, not the penal code. As for infractions committed by children
(persons under twelve years old, according to art. 2 of the ECA), the statute envisions
the application of protective measures (as provided in art. 101) of a non-punitive nature
(Constituição Federal, 1988).

This law also contains a specific provision for cases of juvenile offenders who have
mental illnesses or deficiencies, stipulating that they should receive individual and
specialized attention for their conditions in an adequate facility (art.112, par. 3 of the
ECA). However, the law does not define the manner of care for these adolescents,
which has been governed by health regulations.
Concurrent with these changes in childhood and youth field, the movement in the mental health field in favor of health and psychiatric reforms began to gain strength in Brazil during the 1970s. Various measures encouraging dehospitalization and the creation of alternative services to psychiatric hospitals were taken, setting up a broad movement of workers and patients under the banner of the Anti-Asylum Fight.

In 2001, the Psychiatric Care Reform Law (10.216) redirected the model of mental health care in the country. The law was implemented by giving preference to non-hospital and community facilities (internment being indicated only when those resources prove insufficient, with the ultimate goal of the patient’s social reintegration into his or her home environment), with explicit respect for the fundamental rights of people with mental disorders and their family members, and within a federal structure of management pacts and interdepartmental cooperation rooted in the principles of deinstitutionalization and dehospitalization.

Art. 2 of Federal Law 10.216 of 2001 includes, among the patient’s rights: I—access to the best treatment in the health care system, consistent with his or her needs; II—humane and respectful treatment, for the exclusive purpose of improving his or her health, aiming to achieve his or her recovery by integration into his or her family, workplace, and community; III—protection against all forms of abuse and exploitation; IV—confidentiality guaranteed for all information he or she provides; V—the right to a medical consultation, at any time, to clarify the necessity or non-necessity of his or her involuntary hospitalization; VI—free access to available means of communication; VII—access to all information with respect to his or her illness and treatment; VIII—treatment in a therapeutic environment by the least invasive means possible; IX—treatment preferably through community mental health services.

**PROBLEMATIC DIMENSIONS OF THE INTERFACE BETWEEN THE JUSTICE AND MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS**

Despite having established all of these regulations and parameters for the structuring of a public policy that respects the human rights of children and adolescents, and after twenty years in force, the ECA has had numerous violations of its provisions.

A recent diagnostic by the Ministry of Health and the Secretariat of Human Rights on this subject argues that:

> [W]e have a large gap in understanding the condition of adolescents as citizens with rights, as at risk and as having the special condition of being a person in development, since the system of juvenile accountability still perpetuates custodial hospital models based on asylums and total institutions. These models greatly undermine the quality of care offered to juvenile offenders by forcing correctional-repressive action, when not masquerading as a therapeutic-psychiatric purpose, including recent proposals aimed at maintaining compulsory hospitalization of adolescents over twenty-one years old. (Ministério da Saúde, 2009, p. 33)

Moreover, the interface between juvenile justice and mental health establishes systemic tension, verifiable by the divergent views/interpretations about juvenile offenders in either system. Sectors of the judiciary position themselves within the logic of penal thought, as pro-society, adopting the concept of the juvenile offender’s *dangerous* nature and labeling him/her a public enemy.
To support this understanding, they conscript psychological knowledge, not to use it from a perspective of multidisciplinary care or the right to health, but to subject those who occasionally need mental health care to practices of institutionalization and abusive medication. That is: (a) the use of mental health knowledge and practices in the juvenile justice system from the perspective of the pathologization of the offense and of social defense rather than from an ethic of care and health promotion; and (b) the judicialization of mental health care extending to other areas of adolescence.

This systemic tension could be better examined.

The pathologization of the offense and the psychological-legal continuum work as a resistance to the guarantee of rights.

During the last ten years, Brazil has codified a set of elements connecting “mental disorders” with juvenile criminality in various ways, as a response to increasing demands for risk management stemming from the relationship between society and the infractions committed by adolescents (Castel, 1987). Among these elements, we can highlight:

a) Proposals to modify the legislation in force (the ECA) centered on the argument linking mental disorders with dangerous behavior. An example of this is the bill 2.599, proposed by Federal Deputy Vicente Cascione, in November 2003, which proposes the “obligatory separation of juvenile offenders considered psychopaths or with severe personality disorders, considered difficult or impossible to cure, to be evaluated periodically by a multidisciplinary team; and the provision of security measures within the Statute of the Child and Adolescents including the specification of facilities adequate to its compliance (custodial or psychiatric hospitals)”;

b) Increasing referral of juvenile offenders for psychiatric evaluations aiming to measure their degree of dangerousness and diagnose antisocial personality disorders, principally verified in the state of São Paulo (Vicentin, 2005b);

c) The emergence of a model custodial hospital for psychiatric treatment in the area of juvenile justice, similar to that established for adults who commit crimes and are subjected to security measures, with the creation of the Experimental Health Facility by the state of São Paulo. This facility is designed to offer treatment to offenders who have complied with socio-educational measures in the Foundation Center for Adolescent Socio-Educational Care (CASA) and who have a diagnosis of a personality disorder and/or dangerousness. The justification is that such treatment could not be given in the public health services network, because their facilities comply with Brazil’s public health system (SUS) mental health policy guidelines, which exclude spaces designated for physical restraint. CASA is the governmental institution responsible for carrying out socio-educational measures involving deprivation of liberty (pretrial detention, incarceration, and semi-liberty) of those diagnosed with a personality disorder and/or dangerousness. Young people are there, for the most part, because of sentences of compulsory internment handed down by civil judges. This occurs, in general, when the release of a young person who is under a socio-educational measure involving deprivation of liberty becomes imminent due to one of the causes of compulsory release provided in art. 121 of the ECA (i.e., three years of detention and/or 21 years of age). The internment orders originating from these competency hearings are characterized by their indeterminate length. In other cases, judges may issue protective orders for medical, psychological, or psychiatric treatment in a hospital setting (art. 101, V of the ECA) during the course of a socio-educational internment measure (art. 121 § 3 of the ECA),
suspending such measure for an indeterminate period. The justification is that such
treatment could not be given in the public health services network, because their
facilities comply with the guidelines of the SUS mental health policy, which exclude
spaces designated for physical restraint (Frasseto, 2008);
d) The use of psychotropic medication as a form of control over adolescents under
socio-educational measures, identified in at least four states (Conselho Federal de
Psicologia et al., 2006). The researchers detected that in Rio Grande do Sul around
80% of those juveniles deprived of their liberty were medicated, and that the
diagnoses as well as the medications prescribed were identical, which is evidence of
the abusive use of the substances by the institutions in question.
In addition, the institutional management difficulties at the socio-educational facilities
for deprivation of liberty contributed to the discourse of medicalization and
imprisonment. According to the understanding of the directors of the foundation
responsible for carrying out these measures, the juveniles do not understand, do not
benefit from or subjectively resist the socio-educational plan. That became clear when
the foundation’s superintendent of health affirmed that the aforementioned health
facility would not house the mentally ill, but rather adolescents with “antisocial
behavior,” which she defined as “juvenile inmates who have the tendency to deplete
internment facilities, who do not take care of their personal things, who question and do
not follow rules, the agitated ones” (Frasseto, 2008).
These allegations came in the wake of adolescents’ intense confrontations and
resistance to the repressive mechanisms and biopolitics of power (Foucault, 1988)
present in the detention facilities, as evidenced by several rebellions and riots in
response to torture, humiliation, and mistreatment (Anistia Internacional, 2000;
Vicentin, 2005).
Thus, it is from these institutional routes that this “new dangerous” youth emerges:
one presented as ungovernable and unmanageable is, therefore, dangerous. In this sense,
“danger” seems to be a concept linked to “uncontrollable,” as in “that which escapes
institutional management” (Leonardis, 1998). This provides a renewed discourse of
dangerousness: the adolescent with a personality disorder will be seen as being a
“risk/danger,” who must be treated in a specialized facility—and who could be seen as
conforming to the paradigm of comprehensive protection (which assures his or her right
to mental health care).
According to various experts on socio-educational and justice systems, the lack of a
socio-educational plan in some facilities, the continuous facility transfers that some
adolescents experience (especially in periods of rebellion), and the violations of rights
to which they are subjected are situations that collaborate in the construction of young
people who are profoundly helpless or deeply angry; the latter is very close to a profile
easily “converted” into an antisocial personality.
Actors in the field of health, such as the Project Quixote team in the Federal
University of São Paulo, which in 2000 carried out a ‘diagnostic’ of mental health in
the juvenile detention facilities of São Paulo, alert us that this antisocial personality
disorder is absolutely compatible with the institutional logic.
The most notable among the possibilities in the institutional logic are traits of an
“antisocial personality” (we refer to the concepts conveyed by the official psychiatric
classification systems), which helped the juveniles as much in deprivation of liberty
situations as in a life of crime, and which are, to a certain extent, cultivated by the
institution. Within these institutions, the best (read: “the most antisocial”) survive better
and are more respected, both by the other incarcerated juveniles as well as by the professionals managing their care. So the institution itself is perverse, the rules unclear and not shared by everyone, since they depend on subjective criteria (Sarti, 2000). Essentially, this combining of the offense with a mental disorder has been producing practices directly contrary to the paradigms of the ECA and current national mental health policies. The pathologization of adolescents, i.e., the reduction of complex processes of social vulnerability to a problem of mental illness, leads in the direction of the radicalization of segregationist policies as a response to issues of violence and insecurity, to the detriment of investment in social policies.

The concept of dangerousness seems to acquire connotations that facilitate the extension and diffusion of its use, increasingly more subordinated to the demands of “social defense.” This pathologization prevents the recognition of the phenomena of social exclusion and vulnerability, which are also factors in the commission of an offense, and deprives the subject in question of the possibility of creating social bonds.

Finally, it is worth highlighting a third period (2008-2010) that is emerging in this interface between mental health and juvenile justice, in which the focus is on the issue of “drug addiction” and sending juvenile offenders for drug and alcohol treatment in specialized clinics. The court system is imposing socio-educational measures that do not involve internment along with protective measures that include treatment programs for “drug addicts” to be carried out in recovery houses and therapeutic communities that do require the internment of the adolescent. This sort of “therapeutic justice” applies a model of compulsory treatment in which the adolescent, in order to complete the sanction for his transgression, is subjected to treatment imposed as a duty and not as a right to health. Under this formulation, treatment and punishment tend to take on the same form, both being conditions of the adolescent’s cure or recovery.

Moreover, emphasizing internment as the “gold standard” for the treatment of drug addiction evidences the belief that the drug is the agent of addiction, reducing the practice of substance abuse to the physical manifestations of intoxication. The literature shows, however, that there is no default treatment and that one must work to create a demand, a minimum consent of the adolescent to the treatment. If the clinical work does not manage to move beyond the formal imperatives of the law decreed by the State, it will be doomed to failure (Bittencourt, 2009).

All the above-mentioned arguments create a direction in the mental health care of juvenile offenders that is marked by a custodial-correctional viewpoint to the detriment of a philosophy of care and the right to health.

THE JUDICIALIZATION OF MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND THE EXTENSION OF THE PATHOLOGIZING PERSPECTIVE TO OTHER SECTORS OF ADOLESCENCE

Such a viewpoint affects not only the perpetrators of the infractions, but also extends to other young people and adolescents. Together with the situation presented above, we can observe the growth in the psychiatric internment of adolescents by court order in the largest psychiatric hospitals for adolescents (research shows similar data in three major capital cities: Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Porto Alegre). Such psychiatric internment is marked by being compulsory, by having its length based on judicial determinations (the average length of internment being greater than that of other people hospitalized by other procedures), and resulting in the increased presence of conditions related to
behavioral disorders (therefore, not psychotic) or the use of psychoactive substances (Bentes, 1999; Joia, 2006).

In a survey conducted by the Integrated Center on the Psychosocial Treatment of Children and Adolescents, in the city of Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Scisleski et al. (2008) verified that the issue of drug addiction has been the youth “pathology” that had the highest demand for services at that institution, with youth being commonly sent there by court order. The authors found that, in such cases, the court order seems to play a dubious role: on the one hand, the procedure provides a strategy of access to health care services for young people, yet on the other hand, it is sometimes used as a type of punishment, in the sense that internment is used as an additional disciplinary measure for juveniles. Psychiatric internment works both as a response that gives legitimacy to a “failed individual” and one that reaffirms the marginalized social position of these youth (Scisleski, Maraschi & Silva, 2008).

With the emergence of crack cocaine in Porto Alegre at the end of the 1990s, and because of its highly addictive chemical effect, the association between chemical addiction and behavioral disorders has acquired greater visibility, creating direct correlations in the profile of the drug-user population: young, poor, “delinquent.” This process has established a connection between drug use, social inadequacy, and psychiatric disorders.

Evidence has in fact shown a massive influx of such people into mental health care service facilities. In the case of the Integrated Center on the Psychosocial Treatment of Children and Adolescents, out of the referrals made since 2000, about 50 percent fit the above-specified profile. Currently, most young people submit to treatment as a required socio-educational measure imposed by a judge and experience the contiguity of the institutions of control which runs through this institutional space, thereby mixing the functions of hospital and prison, physician and judge, psychologist and lawyer, nurse and security guard.

**FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

We have noticed a problematic relationship between current protective and/or socio-educational measures and the demands for mental health services, with treatments (most times compulsory) being differently understood by the legal and health fields, when protection is often based more on the need to segregate than on health care. This problematic connection is very evident, as seen above, on the occasions when therapy is confused with punishment or when the treatment and punishment assume the same form, mainly in the case of imposed treatment for drug use.

This set of elements shows that it is necessary to lead a discussion about therapeutic guidelines when they are tied to an individualist logic, which prevents the expansion of a broader approach to the complex and sometimes limited network in which these young individuals are socially inserted, or when such guidelines seek to respond to the demands of social defense.

In this regard, no institution on its own—even among mental health institutions—will be capable of offering alternatives to young people so they can overcome the circumstances of vulnerability that combine to create these legal and medical needs. Only a collective coordination between the different actors and institutions that attend to these adolescents can create alternatives to this asylum circuit (Bentes, 1999; Joia, 2006; Scisleski et al., 2008; Vicentin & Rosa, 2009).
This argument reaffirms an ethical-aesthetic and political agenda for psy professionals and researchers, one strategically oriented to the attainment of human rights, or, at the least, the reduction of their violations, especially in relation to childhood/youth, on the following three fronts:

a) **Psy-practices**, particularly those that occur at the interface with the justice system, in order to prevent the multiplication of measures that might improve the criminal network and to propose, where possible, a social-, health-, or education-oriented alternative (Wacquant, 2008, p. 104): This means questioning the psi field when it operates as a legitimizing factor for coercive technologies. In other words, it is imperative to avoid any use of psychological practices in favor of a clinical criminology, understood as that which deals with diagnosis and prognosis of the conduct of the young person, focusing on social or personal “dysfunctions” as a basis for legitimizing/justifying sanction. This also means working for a clinic of vulnerability, as suggested in Zaffaroni (2003), which seeks to identify the etiology of individual vulnerability to the criminal justice system and promotes the development of knowledge that will collaborate in reducing vulnerability levels.

b) **Strengthening of ties between activists and researchers working on the “criminal and social fronts”** (Wacquant, 2008, p. 104): We understand that there is room to consider the relationship between welfare, mental health, and justice systems, so that they do not act to legitimate one another and so that mental health services do not make the task of disciplining. The modification of the conditions producing vulnerability is an operation in which various actors should be involved. The justice and health systems must disjoin when it comes to defining the legal modalities (criminal and of imposition of measure) through which a teenager is sentenced, but should coordinate in directing the processes of socio-education, psycho-social rehabilitation, and deinstitutionalization.

c) **Consolidation of an ethical dimension**: We must work to reduce violence and expand the components of living together in solidarity, but without losing sight of the unstable and conflicted dimension young offenders inhabit. That is, our commitment is to yield to the instituting forces and the forces of resistance that children and adolescents forge in different ways: committing transgressions, exhibiting symptoms, or inventing new ways of life. We must cease all activities that compress and reduce the space for debate around the conflict, treating youth behavior, for example, only in its criminal aspect. Denaturalizing youth violence involves relocating, in the structures of power, violence perpetrated against young people and suffered by them.

**REFERENCES**


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: This paper is part of a larger work prepared under the partnership between the International Juvenile Justice Observatory—presented in the 4th International Conference of the International Juvenile Justice Observatory (OIJJ), in Rome, in 2010—and the United Nations Latin American Institute for Crime Prevention and Treatment of Offenders (Ilanud Brazil) and had the support of the Interinstitutional Group of Mental Health and Justice, especially of Aline Yamamoto.
Chapter 45

The collective elaboration of trauma

Miriam Debieux Rosa¹ & Sandra Luzia de Souza Alencar²

¹University of São Paulo, Brazil & Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, Brazil
²University of São Paulo—Psychoanalysis and Society Laboratory, Brazil

SUMMARY

In this work we aim to share a potential psychoanalytical practice for treating individuals who experience trauma and grief—often impeded or denied grief—caused by unsustainable socio-political or socio-economic policies. It is a practice that takes into account contexts of exclusion and violence—often including territorial displacement and the psychological impasses it generates—and is specifically centered on the clinic of the traumatic more than on the clinic of the symptom (Rosa, 2002; Rosa, Berta, Carignato, & Alencar, 2009). To this end, we employ experiences of psychoanalytical psychotherapy service in various public institutions in the city of São Paulo and in communities marked by social and political exclusion, as well as those of care provided to immigrants, migrants, and refugees.

THE COLLECTIVE ELABORATION OF TRAUMA

The case of Isaac (not his real name) from the Congo serves as an introduction to our considerations. Upon returning home from work, Isaac and his brother found their home burnt by rebels with their parents and siblings inside. Panicked, the brothers ran away, each in a different direction to improve the chance that at least one of them would survive. Isaac boarded a ship and came to Brazil, where he found shelter in the House of the Immigrant (a hostel run by missionaries dedicated to migration issues). He suffers from insomnia and bouts of anxiety, haunted by images of the burning home. He feels that his greatest suffering is not knowing the fate or whereabouts of his brother, nor how or where to seek him.

The clinic of the traumatic poses challenges and requires non-conventional interventions—which we characterize as a clinical-political-psychoanalytical practice—to address anxiety and grief in their political aspect; i.e., to consider the socio-political production of anxiety and the process of impeding the subjective process of grief. This practice raises methodological questions (individual and / or collective), traps (speaking on behalf of another’s well-being), and impasses concerning the analyst’s desire.

THE SUBJECT VIS-À-VIS TRAUMATIC EVENTS:
THE TRAUMA CLINIC

Our analysis in this paper focuses on the results of psychoanalytic research based on S. Freud, J. Lacan and G. Agambem. We intend to further theorizations about this kind of practice, considering subjects under the destructive effect of situations that dismember
their phantasmic fiction. In other word, we observe that certain situations of violence and exclusion psychically disrupt the subjects because the events they lived exceed their (Subject) representations of reality and of relationships between people. Thus these events seem unreal, unthinkable, impossible to be true. The subject’s reaction of not being able to believe produces a loss of confidence in his perception of the world and of what can be expected of others, a loss of symbolic references to position himself in the discourse, to pronounce himself in the face of the event.

These conditions translate into silence: silenced under the mark of death, the subject is doomed to wander without resting, barred from shared experiences, reduced to a position of a passer of culture. Reduced to a pain passer, a messenger of death and failure, he loses his life in its political aspect in order to maintain his biological life. Moreover, he loses the identificatory bond with those similar to him, their solidarity.

In order to study the relationship between trauma, experience, and transmission, we will formulate a possible direction of treatment that focuses on the transformation of trauma into a shared experience, and the construction of a witness stand, which allows one to take on the role of a transmitter of culture. Such practices entail the private elaboration of mourning articulated with the sense of loss at the collective level, that is, linked to underlying socio-political conflicts.

Such conflicts are strategically dissimulated to hinder reaction, opposition or resistance. This dissimulation takes the shape of discourses laden with prejudices of class, race or gender, i.e. maintaining that the poor are prone to criminality or have low intellectual level. The strategy to dissimulate these discourse entails blaming individuals on the effect of the social practices to which they are submitted. These discourses separate the individuals’ characteristics or behaviors from their social context and from the history of the subject and of his community. Thus, by focusing only on the characteristics highlighted, they disqualify, criminalize, or patologize individuals, thereby promoting more exclusion. In the examples above, poverty is explained by the lack of brainpower or the refusal or inability to follow the laws.

This articulation aims to highlight the effects, sometimes tragic, of the way in which the social and political discourse, full of interest and thirst for power, disguises itself in discourse of the “Other” to capture the subject in its meshes—be it in the subjective constitution, be it in circumstances of subjective destitution. This appears as a hegemonic discourse, akin to consistent, governed by a voraciousness at times with an obscene violence, and interested in maintaining the socio-political status. It aims to rule the subject and focus on its grief, your link to new groups and its subjective reorganization, its clash with the law.

The clinical listening proposed in this study aims to deconstruct these discourses and their prejudices, not only in the social field, but with the very subjects that were captured, entangled, and convinced of the social logic of their exclusion. This entanglement and identification with such attributes deprive them of the power and the desire to confront such forms of submission. Our listening aims to prevent the subject from falling for this trick and taking this discourse as symbolic; naturalized as true. It is essential to listen to and separate the subject’s structural alienation relative to the symbolic discourse from the ideological tricks of power. The overlapping, with ideological objectives of interfering in the processes of constitution and destitution of the subject should be unveiled, worked via the recovering of historicizing social ties in some social groups. It is a clinical and political work insofar as it not only questions and undoes the wiles of power, but also produces resistance to the hegemonic discourse,
compelling the subject to position himself in the social bond, i.e., prompting a collective and political practice.

Thus we believe that the subject can reposition itself in the social bond through the processes which we name here as the collective elaboration of the trauma. The elaboration of the traumatic can be processed by overcoming individual mortifications and blame and by connecting personal history with the history of the communities in their struggles for ideology and for power. The result of this elaboration will cause changes in the significations of the symbolic field in which the loss occurred. In other words, new significations relative to the context that generated or allowed the violence and new visions about the subject that suffered them will allow the subject to give a new direction to his life.

In the above case, Isaac’s guilt for failing to prevent the death of the family and having survived can be re-signified based on the violence prevailing in the country and redeem his and his family’s projects.

The trauma clinic is not specific to the clinical-political interventions to which we have referred. Responses to trauma, in psychoanalysis, have been presented on two levels: fantasy and symptom. In this paper we stress another way, which highlights that the suppression of the elaboration is often due to the subject’s alienation of ideological version of the event. This version paralyzes the subject and perpetuates the anguish and the inability to challenge the prevailing discourse to formulate a subjective question. The violence and the political and social exclusion can weaken the discursive structures that support the social bond, with respect to the circulation of values, ideals, traditions of a culture, whilst protecting the subject from the real and from the discourse of helplessness. This weakened discourse exposes the subject to the risk of confrontation with the traumatic—that which a feeling of unreality—when the dimension of the loss and the difficulty of locating oneself in the world take a prime place and can promote silencing and certain disharmony in the social bond, as we will discuss next.

The traumatic exposes the subject to that which is out of order. Soler (2004) pointed out that traumatism imposes itself in a temporality of rupture: no longer has the subject in itself the slightest part in the event, he cannot link to the past or future. In a study, Alencar (2002) described the disconnection of the inmate with the time before the arrest. The people or the work prior to prison remains only through scattered memories, as if it had not made up his reality. To that extent, it can be said that a traumatic rupture transforms life into distinct segments without processing the loss of a way of life, a past, with another time that should guide everyday living.

Fixing the traumatic moment and the rupture of life in distinct segments promote a very specific subjective answer, namely: silencing, which perpetuates the anguish and hinders the subjective processes of mourning. Silence can be understood as: “This temporary suspension, sometimes lifelong, but temporary and not structural, the way to guard the subject vis-à-vis the position of being disposable in the social structure, a protection necessary for psychic survival, a longing, a hope” (Rosa, 2002, p. 45).

Berta and Rosa (2005) argue that, given the loss of identificatory references, there is a first instance that can be thought of as serving as a reference for the concept of anxiety. Anxiety is the affect that sign a “Real” that cannot be symbolized. Meeting situations that evoke this initial helplessness provoke anxiety, not as a symptomatic manifestation (the case of neurotic anxiety in Freud), nor as a fugue, but as a time in which the subject takes time to locate himself and therefore is bound to the feeling of strangeness, the Freudian Unheimlich.
This time in which the subject finds it hard to locate himself has effects on his subjective position and social bond. Between anxiety and desire, it is necessary to elaborate the grief over the loss, because in this way the subject not only restores his image, but also rebuilds the place from which he sees himself amiable to the “Other” (ideal self), reaffirming a position that allows him to locate himself in the world. Thus the subject builds a metaphorical response, a symptom through which he can speak of his suffering and address a demand.

In situations of violence, grief may be suspended and a position of melancholy emerges, in which the subject cannot name the pain, which is endless. It is, as Freud says, “An open wound that impoverishes the libidinization of the ego identified with the abandoned object ... the shadow of the object fell upon the ego” (1917, p. 281). The process of grief and melancholia, Freud teaches, implies a first-time denial of loss; a retreat is necessary to preserve the object alive and active in the ego. One difference between grief and melancholia is that whereas in the first the subject apparently knows what the lost object meant to him, this becomes impossible in the latter: the subject knows about the loss, but lives as if it had not been processed, in some dissociation or cognitive or emotional withdrawal, while paradoxically he enhances the features of the lost object.

Once this silencing has been observed, we move a step further by addressing its relationship with the anxiety and grief in certain social and political situations. The background of this issue is the manipulation of life and death in the social field, the boundary of ethics. In our research group, this silencing was observed in the following cases: in Japanese immigration by Carignato (2002), in migratory shifts, which cast the subject in an endless wandering (Rosa, Carignato, & Berta, 2009); associated with the particularity of grief and anxiety and promoted by the disappearance of opponents of the Argentinean dictatorship (Berta, 2007), and found in the production of prevented grief in situations encountered by Alencar (2002) on the outskirts of São Paulo, in which cases prevented grief occurs when the loved one who has died is socially disqualified as a gangster or drug dealer, or as crazy, poor, or wretched.

These studies are psychoanalytic practices that address the elaboration of anguish and mourning by joining an individual psychical work with the collective resistance—this double dimension allows us to build the conditions for the elaboration of mourning and political consciousness. Moreover, they reveal the strategies that take into account the socio-political and subjective pre-conditions required for the elaboration of grief. These pre-conditions can be established in the strict clinical sense or through collective practices to enable the production of an act that touches dimensions of the real, imaginary, and symbolic, and, in this fashion circumscribing that which is at times denied socially. Restoring a minimum range of meanings that can circulate, referred to the field of the “Other”, allows individuals to locate themselves and be able to give value and meaning to their experience of pain, articulating an appeal that removes them from their silencing.

The situations of extreme distress and loss of identificatory references entail the provision of psychoanalytic listening that uses presence and words. The listening “assumes breaking down barriers and rescuing the experience shared with others; it should be listening as a testimony and recovery of memory.” Thus, in our clinic, the “presence of the word” that is supported by the “presence of the analyst” occurs through the diversity of interventions: in group activities on themes, Portuguese language
workshops, in individual sessions, in the presence of events and conflicts with institutions.

Therefore, the clinic of the traumatic calls the analyst to a precise location in relation to anxiety. Anxiety emerges precisely when there is no distance between the unconscious demand and the response of the Other, when the distance between utterance and enunciation is lost. Analysts should intend to have a space between statement and enunciation, making room for the speech, saying, “Say more,” and from there they can install the necessary conditions for the subjective localization.

**COLLECTIVELY ELABORATING THE TRAUMA**

The collective elaboration of the trauma is processed from the possibility of a testimony that assumes a committed saying and listening of the subject’s process and its entanglement in politics. A successful transmission offers a space of freedom and a base that enables the abandonment of the past to better meet it again (Hassoun, 1996).

Isaac found himself at an impasse that required a response to confront the horror that presented itself to him: he saved his life by fleeing the country. Isaac’s choice precipitated him beyond fantasy or guilt. Paralyzed in the continuum of the trauma, he has no place from where he can speak. He departed from his country, but did not part, divide, or separate himself. In the deadly silence of exile he is now reduced to a pain passer, a messenger of death and failure. Moreover, he loses the identificatory bond with those similar to him, their solidarity, as they tend to recoil from the horror which, as we shall see, was approached by Agamben (2002b) through the figure of the “Muslim.”

The condition of the Muslim as one who “cannot not remember” evokes an impediment to oblivion, to the repression required to become separated from an event. The excess consistency of the event casts the subject in a monotonous and hopeless present; he is entirely disposable. Experiencing events about which one does not have the least possibility of recognition, insofar as it passes beyond the imaginable or unimaginable, leads to a new ethical impasse. It is an impasse entailing the rupture with this symbolic field; not the subjective assent of his participation, but the suppression of any participation in this enjoyment—here enters the collective dimension. To restore a place in the discourse in order to build social ties, one has to rebuild the history lost in the memory, a reconstruction that is already a deformation, enabling grief and a response to the fiction, a reinterpretation of the past.

Based on these considerations it is possible to conceive a clinical work that enables the construction of the position of witness, transmitter of culture (Hassoun, 1996), which composes the fictional trauma through the elaboration—albeit partial—of the grief, in transforming the trauma through shared experience. These practices involve the collective elaboration of the trauma, creating conditions to alter the symbolic field.

It appears that collective gatherings, religious and secular rituals, may help grieving, because the losses are located in their production, thereby evidencing, indeed, a “creation,” a “reinvention” of the past. Lacan (1958), discussing Hamlet, provides the theoretical basis for the importance of community and rituals to empower the process of grief. The rejected loss of the symbolic reappears in the real.

Rites are the massive intervention of every symbolic game that claims the memory the dead. The work of grief takes place in the collective, in the community. It is gratifying, given the disorder that occurs due to the lack of significants to cope with the
hole created in existence (Lacan. 1958). He thus emphasizes the ritualistic and collective dimension as a precondition for the individual elaboration of grief. Eliminating it is instructive of the contemporary mode of violence and social and ethical degradation (Agamben, 2002a) that affects the whole society and makes it collectively mad.

In this vein, Berta (2007) demonstrates the importance of the demonstrations of the “Madres de la Plaza de Mayo,” a method of fighting the dictatorship to offer pre-conditions for grieving over the missing persons in Argentina. These mothers contested the absoluteness of the totalitarian regime, taking to the streets and causing a rupture that showed to the public what was intended to be private for each family of the missing. In a transformative act, they created a public scene that not only changed the meaning of what was meant to be absolute, but also promoted the recognition of a possible bond with an Other modified by the same act. The grief, which the author calls “political grief,” promoted the “legalization” of the subjective grief, because before that time the missing were a mirage that haunted the social scene, denying or tegiversating the construction of a reality—i.e. of a fiction—which included the political events of that time in Argentina.

Thus, to treat the trauma caused by the intervention of a totalitarian discourse authorizing the reduction of men to debris, erasing all the marks of subjectivity, requires an elaboration based on the reconstitution of the social bond that guides the functioning of the social. That is why we hold that the traumatic social phenomenon should be inscribed and elaborated on the collective level, without, however, belittling the natural responses which make the particular universal. One of them is to build strategies so that from the trauma, the subject may become a passer of the experience.

Alencar (2006) developed elements for a psychoanalytic clinical practice in a neighborhood on the outskirts of São Paulo. Using the local public health service site, he invited associations, social movements, and institutions to carry out joint conversations and actions that created the new face for the situations that presented themselves in a tough, violent manner. There were seminars and meetings, texts were written and distributed at local fairs and events. In short, something was happening there and people saw a space for bonding. This movement was synthesized in the “First Walk for Life” in São Mateus, whose objectives were: to create a collective action in the district, to honor loved ones violently killed in the area, and to create spaces of expression, reception, and symbolization of loss. This walk ended with each participant planting a flower in a square in the neighborhood.

This example illustrates what we call the pre-conditions for producing transformations that touch the real, symbolic, and imaginary dimensions, circumscribing and meaning that which is sometimes denied by society. Restoring a minimum field of significants that can circulate, referred to the field of the Other, allows individuals to locate themselves and to be able to give value and meaning to their experience of pain, articulating an appeal that pulls them from the silencing.

Only then will it be possible to disidentify the event, so that it traces a future for all and becomes a cultural emblem... Thus, recovering the history, taken here as the mark of what must be represented, is a process that opens, for each person, the possibility of being new and not a mere repetition of unresolved grief (Rosa, 2001).
REFERENCES

Chapter 46

Identity projects for migrant families:
Gendered transmission in a context of change

Rebecca Weber
Université de Lyon II, France

SUMMARY

This paper examines social gender identity transmission amongst a community of Sub-Saharan African migrants in France. The theoretical intersection of social identity and social representations constitutes the lens through which identity is analyzed in a context of transition. Examples from fieldwork reveal how social asymmetry resulting from ethnic stigmatization highlights the stability of gender norms and religious practices. By gathering the perspective of migrant parents and children, this study seeks to understand how social gender identity as a function of representations of gender relates to processes of active identity dynamics. Theoretical psychology is examined through the subjective experiences of migrants who develop a gendered translation of social cohesion in a context of global change.

BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE: GENDER IDENTITY AS “RELATIONAL” IN A MIGRATION CONTEXT

This paper examines how migration modulates social gender identity transmission amongst Sub-Saharan African families which have migrated to France. The discourse and interaction analyses expose the dynamics by which individuals co-construct their identities in and through in-group and intergroup relationships. Therefore, given the prototypical context of family acculturation in which parents are raised in one country and their children in another (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2009), we ask whether the children will carry forward or modify the representations of gender proscribed by their parents. What are the boundaries of recognition and exclusion (Capdevila, 2011) from which certain representations of gender are transmitted between family members rather than others? The dynamic between imposed and negotiated identities embedded within an asymmetrical context indeed challenges researchers to develop inventive theoretical approaches to understanding the individuals and groups who define our social worlds.

To apprehend how gender is constructed, transmitted and negotiated amongst migrant families two theoretical positions are adopted: firstly, that social gender identity is acquired in and through socialization (Montero, 2007; Bhavnani & Haraway, 1994); and secondly, that migrants interact with two different systems of representations of gender (Lloyd & Duveen, 1992). In any given culture, children become competent social actors through appropriating available representations of gender (Duveen, 1994). Gender social identity draws from Social Identity Theory as defined by Tajfel and Turner (1986) in reference to the representations of gender shared by the group in which the individual is a member (Kessler, 1978). Identity acts as a set of normative features that renders a guideline for interactions and gender appropriate behavior with actual or
Identity projects for migrant families

internalized others (Zittoun, 2012). While identity can be elaborated internally, one’s own thoughts are embedded in their relationships to other people. Identity is thus considered to be constructed externally through and by social relationship amongst real and symbolic individuals, groups and institutions. Gender norms, prescriptions and proscriptions for behavior, appear as archetypical symbolic operators (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990) because they organize representations from which social gender identity is constructed. Through processes of socialization, each social actor adopts a position marked by different levels of conformity within the available continuum of representations of gender (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Howarth, 2010). As social gender identities can be imposed as well as resisted, this highlights the dynamic between the individual’s personal agency and the limits imposed by their social constraints. In other words, individuals are considered active participants in the construction of their own identity, yet are restricted and constrained by networks of representations that support previously existing hierarchies of knowledge. While one cannot opt out of processes of gendered socialization, one can however, participate in their construction and defense, or even challenge certain representations (Howarth, 2012).

If adopting a social gender identity is intrinsic to developmental processes, this suggests that historically constructed representations are transmitted through social relationships with adults who may seek to sustain an identity project in the future (Reicher, 2004; Chrysochoou, 2003). How does variation in the social context, such as incurred by migration, impact the sense of stability of social gender identity? The second theoretical assumption of this paper considers that the transition encountered by migration could stimulate a new definition of identity and activate processes of sense making for migrants (Zittoun, 2006). Indeed, migration highlights the deconstruction and reconstruction of practices of affiliation between parents and children (Benslama, 2009). As a result, the migrant’s social gender identities are always considered structured by the migration. The migrant may personally identify as such, or is attributed to a migrant identity by others who perceive them as a foreigner, an immigrant, or an emigrant. Since the children are the first family members to originate from the new country they can present an increasingly important future orientated identity project for the parents (Fogel, 2007). Self-knowledge and sense-making draw upon this temporal articulation that interacts with the past to draw upon pre-existing practices and symbolic meanings while the context of migration points to the changes at work in the meanings and norms that structure identity.

In a context of migration in which identity is in transition, will gender identity change or remain stable between parents and their children? Will a continuum of contradictory gender representations appear from which parents and children will negotiate their adoption or rejection?

“WHAT ARE WE HERE?”: LOSS IN SOCIAL STATUS

The above theoretical framework and research questions were examined amongst a population of Sub-Saharan African families in a large French city. We analyzed the discourse (Bardin, 1977; Blanchet, 1982; D’Unrug, 1974; Jodelet, 2003) of 31 interviews with adult migrants (18 women, 6 men) and one focus group (3 young men and 4 young women) in addition to the analysis of interactions (Angrosino, 2008; Dallos, 2006; Millward, 2006) through ethnographic observations of the church activities of a Congolese community.
At the heart of the parents’ discourse is their significant loss in social position and new experience of discrimination as a result of ethnic stigmatization. For the most part, they are Congolese adults who occupied powerful social positions in their country and are now subjected to the local social hierarchies in France that assign them to low social positions, exacerbated by their experience of discrimination. This change in social power is a direct consequence of their migration and results in a generalized perception of a lack of social recognition (Marková, 2000). For example, a Congolese man expresses his ambivalence about living in France:

We didn’t have the intention to come permanently to Europe. And today, we suffer more here than we did there. We had good jobs and were well paid; we lived really really well. Our whole family was well off... in fact really well off.

What are we here? (Nawaza, 58-year-old man from the DRC)

Despite his loss in social position and experience of racism, Nawaza (all names have been changed to protect anonymity) lives free from death threats that initiated his departure from the DRC, but as he articulates, he is paying the price for this safety.

While navigating their loss in social position and experience of negative ethnic stigmatization certain participants speak more specifically about their hopes for their children’s social ascension. Betty, for example, optimistically hopes that her son will access upward mobility through his career. When her son asks her why his skin color is not the same as his classmates, Betty attributes his difference to a positively evaluated category:

I told him that we don’t have the same origins [as the French], we have different origins...It’s just how it is, like our President Sarkozy I would say that he is of Hungarian origin yet of French nationality... I want my son to become President one day, President of the Republic. (Betty, 35-year-old woman from the DRC)

Here she appears to identify with the French President who she assigns to both the category of “the French” and that of the foreign other. This process of identification is contextualized within local intergroup dynamics in which the boundaries of recognition, inclusion and exclusion are negotiated (Capdevila, 2011). She negotiates who can obtain social positions of power by extending President Sarkozy’s foreign origins to her aspirations for her son. Moreover, her reference to him as “our President” further associates her with the French and to a French identity.

The examples of discourse from these parents underline their loss in social status and the ensuing suffering they have endured due to the context of their migration, which produces ethnic categorization. Their lack of social recognition appears to orient the participants towards the future, exemplified by their investment in a religious model of cultural and familial continuity structured by representations of gender.

“WHEN YOU GO INTO A CHURCH YOU FEEL LIKE YOU’RE AT HOME”: RECURS TO STABLE REPRESENTATIONS

The discourse of the adult participants reveals their unanimous recourse to the same religious practices they upheld before their migration. However, within the context of migration they develop new uses of religion that organize meaning to sustain a sense of stability that structures clear identity projects for their children. In other words, the pre-established, pre-existing religious codes appear to become transnational and stable symbolic resources (Zittoun, 2006; Zittoun, in press). The meanings that participants ascribe to their religious practices speak to the ways in which these actions are also
embedded within larger social dynamics of minority and majority relationships in France. Faced with cultural, geographic, and familial rupture, this recourse to a continuous meaning system creates a space in which they unite and build community as members of a stigmatized out-group category “the Africans”. As the Congolese Pastor of an Evangelical church explains: “…We had the need for this African church… We went to French churches, white churches, but there was always something missing…” (Paul-Antoine, 56 year old man from the DRC). The missing element alluded to by the Pastor is specified by other participants as the harsh solitude from which they suffer due to the social structure of the nuclear family in France. They nostalgically refer to “la grande famille,” the extended family through which they had previously defined themselves. The Pastor emphasizes how “the African church” is a space that upholds collectivist social cohesion in direct opposition with the “individualist” behavior he associates with the French: “In the French churches they just leave you in your corner… whereas in our culture you have to go and support the person.” The “us” and “them” dichotomy is clearly intact and regardless of his thirty-four years of residency in France, the Pastor undoubtedly identifies as Congolese and speaks for the collective Congolese immigrant community. This description of the church as a social space that satisfies the pursuit of collective social system resonates with many participants. Milaure for example explicitly describes the church as a resource she uses to manage her arduous process of acculturation:

When I first arrived I was first under culture shock…I was disoriented because I left my country, I left my children so it was painful, it was difficult, difficult for me to adapt to living here…There are no differences between churches, when you go into a church you feel like you’re at home, it’s the same prayers and everything… (Milaure, 64-year-old woman from the DRC)

She highlights the transnational nature of her recourse to the church; it is an unchanging support base that provides a direct link with the feeling of familiarity and belonging.

For other participants, the church appeals to them as an extension of their parental authority that maintains the transmission of representations of gender that feed into their identity projects for their children. Maely, for example, projects a religious framework that encompasses a distinctive gendered lens, when she evokes her children’s marriages:

You have to get married because back home we do not have children outside of marriage… As soon as you cross that line if the child arrives or doesn’t arrives, in any case you are now a wife before anything else and afterwards you become the mother of your children, there you go, there are certain steps back home that are vital, obligatory … I am obliged to transmit this culture, my culture, to my daughters … Basically God created Woman so we can’t, I mean we have a role to uphold, certain behaviors to carry on. (Maely, 35-year-old woman born in France, parents from Somaliland)

Maely considers women to be first defined by their marital affiliation founded on the logic of reproduction. Her use of the pronoun “we” and her reference to “back home” seem to indicate her inscription and identification to her country of origin, although she was born in France. Furthermore, she considers herself personally obliged to transmit these gendered religious norms to her children. She extends asymmetrical values on social roles in accordance with normative representations of gender and considers herself obliged to uphold the transmission of such representations to her children. Her adoption of this naturalist ideology (Kergoat, 2002) supports the stable reproduction of
the representations of gender at the centre of her own social gender identity which she associates to her cultural origins despite her having been born in France.

As the examples illustrate, the parents negotiate the inequalities of their post-migration context. A generalized lack of social recognition contextualizes their fluctuation between in-group and out-group social identifications while emphasizing the continuity of gendered representations and religious practices, particularly in terms of their children’s future. However, the discourse of the children of migrants, young adults raised in France, expose how they adopt, extend, reject and challenge the representations of gender at the heart of their parents social gender identity projects.

BETWEEN CHOICE AND OBLIGATION: CHILDREN NEGOTIATE THEIR PARENTS’ IDENTITY PROJECTS

The young adult participants negotiate the adoption and rejection of their parents’ gendered transmission most notably through their choice of marital partners and the degree of religious implications this has. For the most part, they do not want to transgress social norms but do express their ambivalence towards the full adoption of their parents’ identity projects. From the youths’ perspectives, the church proves to be a space that promises the guarantee of in-group socialization and the maintenance of representations of gender. This tension results from the power dynamics at play between their parents’ desire for them to conform and the construction of their own agency. In this excerpt from a focus group, Christelle describes how she has attended church her entire life because her mother obliged her to:

I was practically born here [in the church], I was raised here and little by little if we don’t have a reason to come to church we don’t come anymore and actually in the end when I started coming back to church it was because it was a place that provided reassurance … but there was a period of time when I wasn’t coming … (Christelle, 21-year-old woman born in France, parents from DRC)

Initially, Christelle did not choose to participate in church activities but eventually consciously decides to become a member of the evangelical community, only after the church carries specific meaning for her. She switches between the individual and collective pronoun as though her own experience of negotiation is a common experience for other youth. While Christelle’s appropriation of her role as an active church member presumably responds positively to her mother’s expectations, her engagement is in fact dependent on the development of her own subjective point of view.

Palma’s discourse exemplifies how through her marital alliance her parents have projected their desire for her to adhere to their own social group. She conveys her ambivalence with regards to dating boys because she wants to uphold her parents’ expectations:

It’s super hard because we have customs to respect and then if we rebel it’s as though we don’t care or we don’t respect them that much so… I prefer to wait [to date boys] because I really don’t have the audacity to face my mother… I know that I have my values, I have my name to respect. (Palma, 20-year-old woman born in France, parents from RDC)

Again, Palma shifts between using the “we” that associates her to her family and social group and then the “I” that conveys her individual appropriation of the values and practices upheld by her social group. Her adherence to such alliance rituals appears to
regulate multiple levels of social meaning and the expectations of her family. Transgressing her mother’s expectations would threaten the reputation of her entire family (both the family’s history and their future reputation) and she responds with an appropriation of a wider, more general notion of “values”. Furthermore, Palma describes how her father has simultaneously given her the responsibility and freedom to choose her life partner while communicating the difficulties associated to marriages with an out-group member. Palma appears wedged between free choice and obligation. It is as though a symbolic boundary is drawn and Palma is not sure on which side she belongs; do her parents discourse take precedence over her heart? Her choice of marriage partner will solidify her social inscription that could sustain or cause a rupture with her family’s expectations.

The young adult participants appear to ambivalently navigate between the adoption and rejection of their parents’ projections. Those who subscribe to rituals of alliance carried out within their family’s social group maintain religious and ethnic affiliations that imply specific representations of gender. However, romantic alliances call this transmission into question by solidifying the boundaries of recognition and exclusion from which gendered norms are transmitted between family members. Their individual social identities intersect with larger group and societal trajectories that uphold and promote systems of meaning. They are confronted with the possibility of defining their own identity through and by their relationships with others (Capdevila, 2011). Their adoption or rejection of their parents proposed gender social identity projects reveals the stakes of sustaining or denying social practices that defend certain representations of gender.

For the children of migrants, the transmission of gendered identity projects appears to result in a contradictory double-bind (Guênif-Souilamas, 2003): between upward mobility and symbolic and social fidelity, they are asked to subscribe to both present and inherited social gender identities.

THEORETICAL INTERSECTIONALITY TO APPREHEND GENDERED TRANSMISSION

An intersection of theoretical frameworks is called for in order to apprehend the dynamics of negotiating identities amongst a population in a particularly complex social context. Here, the intersection of social identity and social representations theories provides a lens to understand how children engage and resist fidelity to their parents’ identity projects. Furthermore, symbolic resources relate to the theory of social gender identity, by accounting for the social, personal and symbolic stakes of religious practice.

If representations of gender are constitutive in identity and related processes, such as social identification and categorization, they therefore exercise some constraint on a person’s access to or use of a specific symbolic resource (Zittoun et al., 2003). Representations of gender can thus be reinforced or challenged by such uses of symbolic resources. The parents’ discourses confirm how representations of gender are reinforced by their recourse to religion as a transnational symbolic resource.

This paper sought to show how a gendered translation of social cohesion emerges through and because of migration. This speaks to the transformation and resistance of social gender identity at the interface of the individual and the social (Howarth, 2010). By gathering the perspective of migrant parents and children, this study highlights how social gender identity as a function of representations of gender relates to processes of
active identity dynamics (Kadianaki, 2006). The theoretical intersectionality allows us to apprehend the complexity of identity construction and transmission of those individuals who constitute contemporary societies.

REFERENCES


Chapter 47

A realist approach to investigating inequalities in old age

Mary Breheny & Christine Stephens
Massey University, New Zealand

SUMMARY

Older age is a time of embodied decline which conflicts with discourses of positive ageing. Critical realist discursive approaches attempt to incorporate material realities, but neglect the structural inequalities which produce differences in embodied ageing. This paper suggests a realist approach to discursive analysis that attends to both the structural and embodied basis of older people’s talk. This highlights the structural arrangements that limit access to an engaged and positive older age, and also configures expectations for a certain sort of older age. Rather than searching for verifiable evidence of individual instances of inequality and disadvantage, we suggest critically investigating talk about material objects and physical bodies to understand the material aspects of social lives. This approach to analysis can be used to explore the intersection of material and discursive structures which point to the ways social structure constrains all people, rather than identifying individual instances of material constraint.

INTRODUCTION

In psychological research on inequalities in older age, a discursive approach has been useful to emphasize the situated and constructed nature of the social world, and demonstrate the limitations of the medical model of health and illness (Willig, 2000). Using this approach, dominant discourses of positive or successful ageing have been shown to highlight individual responsibility for a healthy and engaged older age (Rozanova, 2010). Such discursive resources, promoted for and drawn upon by older people today are grounded in neoliberal ideologies focused on individual responsibility for reduction of risk to physical health (Asquith, 2009). Consequently, a healthy and active later life becomes evidence of a life well lived. Although such discourses influence the experience of ageing for all, the ways in which an individual is positioned as successful or not, also depends upon their social and material location (Breheny & Stephens, 2010). Although people are active in constructing their sense of self, they do so in the context of the material conditions in which they find themselves (Nightingale & Cromby, 2002; Wainwright & Turner, 2006). Consequently, understanding the experience of ageing must include the intersection of discursive accounts of ageing and material circumstances.

Older age is a time of embodied physical changes which conflict with the subject of positive ageing discourses. Attention to a positive and successful later life effectively ignores the decline of the ageing body, although the ageing body is a central concern of older people (Laz, 2003). In addition, the material circumstances of older people’s lives vary greatly and older people are more likely to experience poverty than working age people (Brady, 2004). Government policy and institutional power also have considerable material effects on older people. Policy affects the minimum age for...
pensions or superannuation and may promote individual responsibility for income provision and health care, which are aspects that determine the standard of living for many older people. Embodiment, materiality and institutional power are not separate. As a New Zealand study of older women living with a chronic condition found, issues of failing health, financial concerns, and institutional decision-making are bound together in women’s talk about ageing (Giddings, Roy, & Predeger, 2007). Consequently, the ways that older people have of describing themselves, their social connections, their health and future depend upon both the available discourses in their social world and the material conditions of their lives.

As noted by scholars across the last two decades, there are problems with including these material aspects of life when focusing on the analysis of language. Discursive theorizing, while highlighting important aspects of social relationships, has ignored the experience of a material biological entity (Sampson, 1998; Stephens, 2001; Watson, 2000). From a discursive perspective, the physical body is reduced to a lifeless prop which carries the signs of power, gender or social status (Baerveldt & Voestermans, 1998). In general, such critiques have suggested that the turn to discourse, while including the social meanings of health and illness and the importance of power relations in those constructions, has insufficiently accounted for the very physical constraints on the production of embodied selves. These physical constraints include the failing or disabled body and access to material resources such as food and money which contribute to wellbeing. As people age, such constraints become particularly salient and increasingly difficult to ignore within any understandings of ageing and health.

CRITICAL REALIST DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Critical realism provides us with a theoretical focus on structural and social inequalities which includes the very material effects of discourse. A critical realist position suggests that lives are shaped and constrained by physical bodies, material circumstances, and society (Nightingale & Cromby, 2002). Critical realism attends to the material and embodied aspects of people’s lives as well as the discursive constraints of social life in inquiry into health and ageing (Williams, 1999). The critical focus in social science research is on the social structural arrangements that produce varying material conditions (Neuman, 2000). Using discourse analysis from this epistemological basis enables us to consider how public policies and institutions have very real material effects.

Sims-Schouten, Riley and Willig (2007) provided our first methodological approach to critical realist discourse analysis. These authors described an approach in which participants’ talk is understood as a discursive act situated within and enabled by the material circumstances of the speaker (Riley, Sims-Schouten & Willig, 2007). To recognise the constraining effects of material circumstances on the production of talk, evidence for the material conditions of their participants’ lives were drawn from sources external to the talk such as interviewers’ assessments of the living conditions of individuals and resources available in the community. These assessments were used as evidence for particular material constraints. Sims-Schouten, Riley & Willig (2007) argue that these can be interpreted as evidence of “extra-discursive reality” to understand why people use some discourses and not others. Using this approach, we analyzed interviews with older people alongside survey data on their physical and mental health, income, wealth, work history and social support (Breheny & Stephens,
The attraction of this approach was the way that it allowed physical and material constraints on individual lives to be explicitly incorporated into the analysis. By combining interview accounts of poverty and ill health with survey data of low income and diagnosed health conditions, we were able to demonstrate how the discourses that older people drew upon were grounded in the material conditions of their lives. By doing so, we were able to illustrate the discursive work that older people must do to present themselves as ageing positively and virtuously even in the context of considerable material and physical limitations.

However, not all accounts of later life were clear cut. Complex and contradictory explanations were particularly telling, however, they presented difficulties within a methodological approach which combines assessment of material constraint with discursive claims. Consequently, this approach created possibilities for analysis, but also introduced special problems for any accounts in which the extra-discursive data did not agree with the speaker’s description of their material circumstances. What were we to do about participants whose interview accounts of their material circumstances did not map unproblematically on to the assessments of health and material circumstances provided by the survey data? It could be argued that the data we used was unsuited to capturing the “real” material constraints of the lives of these older people, and suggest alternative ways that these constraints could be captured unmediated. However, all forms of data collection (health and hospital records, tax and bank statements, income and outgoings, inequalities in health and housing policy) provide mediated access to the material conditions of people’s lives. They are all representational and depend upon the context in which they are collected. This empirical difficulty highlighted the epistemological flaws in this approach to critical realist discourse analysis, also noted by Speer (2007). We argue further that these types of evidence do not provide access to any extra-discursive reality, nor can these external measures be matched with the use of specific discourses.

First, using “objective” measures of material living circumstances as evidence for “extra-discursive reality” obscures the very constructed nature of these extra-discursive sources and privileges their status as some sort of super-reality. This is a collapse back into a positivist epistemology which privileges the senses and apparently objectively recorded data. Because a social constructionist and positivist epistemology are incompatible, the social functions of talk are accorded a secondary role in producing “reality.”

Secondly, the “extra-discursive” factors do not simply map on to the use of specific discourses. For example, in the area of childcare decision making, the claim “I cannot afford to stay at home” is used as an example of “an extra-discursive reality which the participant orients to when she makes this statement” (Sims-Schouten, Riley, & Willig, 2007, p. 110), although the authors concede the amount of income that is insufficient for each mother to stay at home may differ. The authors claim that a statement can be both an extra discursive reality and deployed to achieve particular outcomes in the context of the talk. However, there is no way to determine when this statement is orienting to an extra-discursive reality. We agree with Sims-Schouten, Riley and Willig that such claims are not usefully interpreted as a convenient construction that justifies a mother’s decision to go out to work, as this ignores the social structural systems in which such decisions are made. Suggesting that talk is both a discursive accomplishment and a reflection of the material conditions of life is fine when described in general terms. The difficulty arises when we attempt to systematize when, and in what ways, and in what
amounts, the extra-discursive can be understood to encroach on the discursive. What income is low enough to make it “really” constraining? What government policies and psychological theories constrain women working (or older people ageing well)? How will we know an extra-discursive reality when we see it?

Thirdly, this approach to critical realist discourse analysis focuses on supporting individual claims about the constraints of material conditions rather than the critical realist project of investigating how social structural forces produce material conditions of life and accounts of social life.

In developing our critical realist approach to empirical work, we have been guided by Pierre Bourdieu (1977; in terms of structuring effects of everyday practice) and Rom Harré (in Bhaskar, 2001; who sees the structures of social life reproduced in discourse). Harré and Bourdieu both claim that social structures have their force, not as reified entities (which can be observed by counting material artifacts), but through the practices and accounts that reproduce the social order in everyday practice and interaction between social actors. Additionally, Højgaard and Sondergaard (2011) have drawn on Barad to explain that “realism is not about representation of something substantialized or something that is already present as the difference between subject and object, between materiality and discourse. Realism is about real effects of intra-activity.” (p. 346). Thus, claims about the structural reality to which speakers orient are better understood in the context of that talk itself. In the data of Sims-Schouten, Riley & Willig (2007), this includes accounts of the need to make conspicuous material displays of social status, and requirements for intensive and expensive childrearing practices among the middle classes, which have a reality beyond the specific instance of such claims.

Consequently, there are difficulties with approaches to critical realist discourse analysis which combine data in these ways. Firstly, there is no basis on which external assessments of the material circumstances of an individual speaker can be said to have any additional validity over the discursive accounts. Secondly, the material does not map on to the discursive simply or unproblematically. Thirdly, this approach focuses on supporting individual claims about the constraints of material conditions rather than the critical realist project of investigating how social structural forces produce material conditions of life. The body (and other material conditions of people’s lives) is not the same as or limited to what can be known about it (Williams, 1999). This approach to analysis systematically includes features of the material world, but it obscures the mediated and constructed nature of these features. Instead of re-introducing survey or other seemingly objective observational data to support an individualized discursive analysis with evidence of material constraint, we suggest interrogating talk as providing signposts for the wider societal structures that enable and constrain both people’s material lives and their discursive and rhetorical accounts to produce accounts of material disadvantage which are more than individual. According to Harré (in Bhaskar, 2001) we can interrogate the relatively enduring social and economic structures that produce the material conditions of people’s lives through observations of the complex narrative patterns that provide the rules and rights of social life to show how these structures have very real material effects. How do we introduce an analysis of material constraint into discourse analysis? Edwards, Ashmore & Potter, (1995) state:

The problem with the idea of objective limits on textual readings, or on descriptions of physical events, is that it is impossible to say in advance of discussion what exactly they are, outside of the circularity of taking the authors word for it. (p. 32)
As these authors state, realism relies on procedures which establish things as real. Yet, from a critical perspective, we cannot “take people’s word for it,” as words are situated accounts produced to achieve certain outcomes within a particular social context. Critical realist discourse analysis is not about asking people what they have and using these accounts to infer the nature of the material, embodied, and social world. It is about using the researcher’s interpretation of what the world looks like, the way it structures what can be done, and what a body can be and do. Using this approach to the analysis of textual material provides evidence of the material conditions of life which is beyond the speakers’ literal account of the conditions of life they experience. Instead, it involves interrogating their talk for evidence that the material world influences what the speaker can do and be.

As a starting point, rather than attempting to justify the material conditions of life as genuinely constraining for all people who claim that it is so, we accept that some rhetorical claims of poverty, ill health, and hardship are convenient constructions designed to shore up the morality of the speaker, rather than an accurate assessment of difficulty. In addition, some claims of adequate living standards and ability to cope by some older people are also rhetorical devices used to demonstrate capability to manage in challenging environments (see Mansvelt, 2012) rather than an accurate assessment of the adequacy of material resources. In this case, we return to two claims. People are active in negotiating their discursive presentation in the world to achieve particular aims. They must do so in the context of the material conditions of their lives. Rather than using critical realist discourse analysis to identify individual material constraints in people’s lives this approach more faithfully follows the requirement of critical realism when it moves beyond this to identifying the enduring structures that produce these material constraints.

We suggest that a critical realist approach which understands talk as a rhetorical accomplishment designed to achieve particular social outcomes, which reflects the discourses that structure social life, and is grounded in the material circumstances of participants’ lives can be achieved by interrogating people’s talk. Consequently, we will make some suggestions for analyzing the impact of material constraint which acknowledges the ways that older people manage the identity work of presenting themselves as morally virtuous and valued social actors, using available discursive and material resources. In particular, we suggest examining how talk about ageing illuminates the world in which the talk takes place (while including the demands of the immediate conversation), and how the material conditions of life produce particular ways of being for older people. This work provides a starting point for using critical realist discourse analysis to highlight material inequalities in ageing.

**DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE MATERIAL WORLD**

Where does this leave us in attempting to do critical realist discourse analysis? The attraction of the method proposed by Sims-Schouten, Riley and Willig (2007) was the explicit recognition that things outside the text exist, and their existence has implications for what people can say, do and be. To retain this advantage, whilst moving beyond individual assessments of the material circumstances and claims about the possibilities for ageing well, we suggest the analysis of talk for evidence of material constraint. In particular we see possibilities in interrogating the objects that exist in the lives of older people, and descriptions of bodies for understanding inequalities in later life.
A realist approach to investigating inequalities in old age

One way of incorporating material conditions is through understanding the role of material objects in the lives of older people. Investigating what specific, physical objects enable people to do (Chapman, 2006) and what physical objects enable people to be introduces the material back into discursive analysis. Physical objects shore up the kinds of people we can be, both materially and discursively. We need to consider the “role of the materiality of physical objects in their relationship with older people” (Chapman, 2006, p.208). These relations exist in larger contexts, which also need to be examined as objects, as well as discursive accomplishments of later life. When we compare the material objects that occur in older people’s accounts of later life, they represent the gendered and class based possibilities for action. Consequently, material objects can be likened to chess pieces that move according to certain rules. Although talk about objects does not reflect only their physical structure, examining the rules for how and when they can be deployed with what effects reveals the patterns of possibility which illustrates material and social conditions of inequality in later life. Interrogating these things as objects that enable certain sort of capabilities, and require certain actions of the speaker, points to the constraint of the material world.

An advantage of critical realist discourse analysis is through acknowledging the embodied nature of ageing. The positive ageing discourse is premised on the denial of physical decline; however, older people resist the hegemony of this discourse by drawing attention to changes in their bodies and the apparent ageing of others in their talk about later life (Pond, Stephens, & Alpass, 2010). These aspects are an important part of a critical realist analysis of ageing as “they are extra-discursive to the extent that we can’t talk our way out of them” (Newton, 2003, p. 22). Even for older people who experience good health, expectations of later life are often discussed around possibilities and future uncertainties. In this way the biological and social bodies are inextricably linked. Evidence of decline is reported to others, but also written on the body, and these are taken up to anticipate future biological events. Accounts of the body are discursive but the types of bodies that people have and their accounts of bodily experience provide one way of accessing the embodied experience of later life.

Examining the discursive data for evidence of material constraint requires insight and understanding of the limitations and possibilities of analysis. Particular topics can provide an analytic lever to interrogate the material aspects of ageing whilst acknowledging the situated and constructed nature of this talk. In the area of ageing and later life, we found that notions of time are a fruitful way of focusing attention onto material aspects of ageing. Older people foreground notions of time, their expectations for how much time they have left, whether this time will be a time of health and capacity versus time in frailty. This is tied up with the need for certain sorts of material objects that will last over time, with experiences of embodied health and with anticipation of the future, which is often based in experience of the past. Analysis requires recognition that older people live with different amounts of time, and such ideas structure expectations of security and health. Older people in particular demonstrate the history that has brought them to this place and produces preferences for a certain sorts of life and expectations for what futures are possible.

Using a critical realist discourse analytic approach examines the rhetorical work that reflects and reinforces the moral and social values of the wider community. It also identifies the wider structures such as neoliberal constructions of the good citizen, and gendered constructions of family life that structure subjectivity. Positive ageing provides a discursive background for maintaining a positive and valued social identity.
as people age. However, the ability to position oneself as active, engaged and independent is influenced by the material circumstances of people’s lives. Physical aspects of later life similarly cannot be understood without attention to the social aspects of embodiment and decline. Thus, talk about ageing is best understood in the context of older people’s material circumstances and the wider social context. This approach highlights the taken for granted material conditions that affect the use of dominant discourses of ageing, as well as the constructed and shifting nature of the ageing body.

Understandings of the structure of the social, material, cultural and historical world can be gained from investigating talk. Both current material conditions and rhetorical negotiations provide evidence for the social structural arrangements that reinforce inequalities. It is possible to take a critical stance to talk, and to use this to illustrate the conditions under which people live, and make suggestions for alternative arrangements that would provide more equitable distribution of life chances. Of course, these accounts are subjective, depend upon the sorts of evidence included and excluded, and reflect the predilections of the researcher. From a critical realist stance, how could they be otherwise? This does not mean that all accounts are created equal. Some discursive constructions are more easily enabled by some structural arrangements and consequently some claims about the nature of these social structural arrangements may provide better accounts than others (Patomäki & Wight, 2000). Of course, we need to resist making “authoritative claims about the ‘real’ and its generative mechanisms” (Al-Amoudi & Willmott, 2011, p. 41). Instead, we need to make speculative suggestions for how we might better understand the way the material world constrains people from realising the full range of opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Where does this leave critical realist discourse analysis? Critical realist discourse analysis acknowledges the material circumstances of people’s lives and through doing so, allows us to understand material constraint. Although people differ in the ways they are constrained by their material circumstances, these constraints do not belong to them individually. They are socially and structurally generated. Material reality may be identified in human activity and in the complex patterns that provide the rules and rights of social life, but these patterns are not individual, even though the effects of them can be seen in the lives of individuals. Analysis is not about taking the speakers word for it, or about searching for evidence beyond the discursive of material realities. It is about critically interrogating talk to examine the shape of the material world. We need to approach both the language and the material circumstances critically to do justice to the inequalities that really exist in the world.

REFERENCES


Chapter 48

What’s behind philosophy?
Covert psychological connotations and philosophical insights to enrich psychotherapeutic applications

Emmanouel Kougioumzoglou, Ioanna Bitchava & Angel M. Paleologou
University of Ioannina, Greece

SUMMARY

Already in 1954 Jaspers cried “There is no escape from Philosophy. The question is only whether [it] is good or bad, muddled or clear.” Accumulated experience in psychotherapy eludes the necessary: to consider before refuting any, even partial, merging. Alas, neither the psychotherapeutic “cure records,” nor the increasing numbers of psychologically needy persons constitute convincing evidence to refute such merging. Amongst prominent approaches in the healing constellation, an innovative discipline emerges—even just to trigger fresh insights: Therapeutic Philosophy, an independent field of endeavors aiding destitute humans, advocates that Philosophy promises vital advances and essential rejuvenation for, and stands skeptical about the eventuality of what Psychotherapy conceptually endorses: anguish exemption. Therapeutic Philosophy seems capable of becoming a valid alternative therapeutic approach. Still, besides remaining detached from fundamental psychotherapeutic principles, it unveils neither methodological conformity, nor theoretical accordance. Investigative interest is here focused on exemplifying both, benefits derived from relevant applications and capacities for furtherance, drawing from hidden assumptions tentatively shared by both domains.

INTRODUCTION

Approaching a theme long-forgotten by Theoretical and Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy is risky. Firstly, because the two domains are seemingly disparate; but it is here anticipated that their being conceptually associable will unfold. Secondly, retrieval of outmoded material, indeed, with intention to re-enact it, might raise suspicions: at the least, for lack of originality; and at the most, for being nonsensical. Yet it is here trusted that the emerging perspectives will disprove hesitations. Recent Theoretical and Clinical evidence on Philosophically oriented Psychotherapy manifestly attract great attention (Flynn, 2005; Segal, 2007), although inevitably outnumbered by the long-held scientific production of traditional psychotherapeutic results (Hansson-Bjorkman & Svensson, 1995; Robinson, 1996; Health Department, 1999). It may so be taken as insufficient, hence considered inconclusive. Yet, such evidence is indicative enough to stimulate optimism (Hodge, 2006), thus sanctioning our investigative interest in its value.

Before posing questions on practicalities about the two disciplines’ potential merging, an account must be made to inspect any psychotherapeutic profits from applications of Therapeutic Philosophy. Also, to unveil issues related to the absence of methodological consensus of its representatives, and at the same time to keep the
potential cooperation of the two Humanistic Sciences in perspective by caring for conditions and presuppositions. Further, to critically draw a parallel between Philosophy and Psychotherapy, without neglecting occurrences in the “greater picture” of the contemporary scientific milieu. Some perceive them as antagonistic, others as complimentary. We argue that, in good faith to future encouraging evidence adding to the Philosophical Psychotherapy’s viability and sustainability, cooperative grounds for the two disciplines would clearly lift constraints of the functional capabilities that each of them faces when independently operating; and that both disciplines’ historical endowment and efficacious equipment of innovative implements do provide inherent precepts, sufficient to continue the psychotherapeutic metaphor into freshly conceived realms: (a) of new meaningful amelioration prospects, which may well predict the very theoretical, and even clinical future and (b) of innovative beneficial applications in the service of the human Need.

**THEORIZING THERAPEUTIC PHILOSOPHY FOR INNOVATION**

For those familiar with the discipline of Ancient Greek Philosophy, the idea of it as of therapeutic value seems to be fairly clear. The belief that Philosophy is able to heal the human soul is common, even though via a philosophical polyphony. On the one hand, Ancient Philosophical Psycho(-)therapy, tends to appear almost indissolubly in parallel with a draft of a medical analogy. It thus purports the offer of a philosopher to the psyche as comparable to what the aid of a doctor to the body suffering physical pain is (cf. Annas, 2002, p.109). On the other hand, it borders ethical, even theological conceptualizations as it sets up the therapy of human soul from its passions. These are thus conceived as expressions of mental anguish precipitated by psychological pain within strenuous situational contexts. They are then targeted as a long-term healing goal of applications abiding to the Socratic, Sophistical, Cyrenaic, Cynical, Stoic, Epicurean, or Sceptical philosophical orientation (cf. Hadot 1995, pp. 82-89; Dellis, 2005, pp. 33-37).

Currently, *Therapeutic Philosophy* can be defined as a pioneering trend employing innovative philosophical percepts for psychologically needful individuals, groups and organizations, on concrete cases or thematic fields, for the treatment of which traditional psychotherapeutic methods seem to be of lesser, or of no capacity or velocity to tackle (cf. Kougioumzoglou et al, 2010; Tjeltveit & Knapp, 2005). Its core idea stems directly from the continual of Ancient Greek Philosophical spectrum: Socrates–Sophists–Cynics–Stoics–Epicureans (Lahav & Tillmanns, 1995, pp. x-xvi; Phillips, 1998, pp. 48-49; Dellis, 2005, pp. 19-80; Kougioumzoglou et al., 2011).

Although newly established, therapeutic philosophy already enumerates many discernible dimensions as: *Philosophical Counseling* (Raabe, 2001), *Philosophical Psychotherapy* (Sahakian, 1969; Rizos, 2010), *Wise Therapy* (LeBon, 2001), *Clinical Philosophy* (Koestenbaum, 1978), *Philosophical Praxis* (Achenbach, 1984), and *Philosophical café* (Sautet, 1995). Sometimes these approaches tend to converge with, but other times seem to doubt and even absolutely excommunicate any possible relevancy to the traditional psychotherapeutic methods—hence “Unitarians” vs. “Separatists.”

Sahakian (1969) originally submitted the theoretical idea, oriented towards unambiguous “Unitarian” positions. He defined philosophical psychotherapy as “a cognitive form of therapy producing behavioural change and emotional control by
restructuring the patient’s thoughts, philosophical outlook, or attitude” (Sahakian, 1980, p.37), asserting that his innovative model originates from the Ancient Greek Philosophy, especially from Stoicism (Sahakian, 1969, p. 33) and Epicurism (Sahakian, 1974, p.179). By explicitly declaring the disjunction of his approach from the traditional psychotherapy, he also conceded, however, its close relationship with psychotherapeutic approaches such as the Person-centered therapy, Logotherapy (Sahakian, 1974), Rational-emotive therapy (Sahakian, 1969) and Existential therapy (cf. Sahakian, 1976)—which, in themselves are fundamentally associated with the Ancient Greek philosophical thought of the largely same Shakanian orientations.

Extending Sahakian’s earlier “Unitarian” viewpoint, Peter Koestenbaum stressed the necessity to assess the person from different philosophical and psychological perspectives, asserting that people are not merely agonized over psychological issues, but also about major “life-problems,” closely interwoven with a their existence per se (Koestenbaum, 1978). He recommended an integration between Philosophy and Psychotherapy (Koestenbaum, 1971) and proposed Clinical Philosophy as “the confluence of a combined phenomenological model of being and existential personality theory with depth psychotherapy” (Raabe, 2002, pp. 31-32).

Highly influential, Gerd Achenbach keenly endorsed Philosophy’s reactivation for aiding humans in coping with major life events, and in 1982 introduced the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Philosophische Praxis, later (1992) adding the prefix: Internationale. Progressively, though, an entanglement arose about terminology. For example, Lahav and Tillmanns (1995, p. 61) observe that “the expression ‘philosophical praxis’ is used in Germany and some other European countries to refer mainly to philosophical counselling, but also to other applications of philosophical thought on a concrete situation.” Schuster’s (1999) explicit clarifications expurgate these issues. By reducing Philosophical Counseling, she clearly concurs with the Achebachean approach, and she poignantly remarks that the term might be used by “traditional” psychologists and counselors in order to diminish credit and headway of the expeditious Philosophical Praxis model, thus keeping their dominance in the management of psychological pain.

However, gradually, the term tends to prevail, notwithstanding that it bears, particularly in its European aspects, concrete Achenbachean “traces”—the only apparent exception being the Greek model (Rizos, 2010), of more innovative implements and tight coherence as compared to both European and American. Nonetheless, Achenbach’s “Separatist” tenets are echoing in pending concerns relating to the scientific/dialectic controversy within circles of philosophical counselors disputing the ability, indispensability, and validity of a convergence with other established psychotherapeutic methods. The “Separatists” strongly refute any relevance to psychotherapy (see Raabe, 2003; Achenbach, 1995), and they outbid by encouraging new “self-readings” essentially through philosophical filters. In contrast, “Unitarians” strongly prompt for a turn of Philosophical Counseling to Psychology, and correspondingly of Psychological Counseling to Philosophy. As Amir (2004) implies, Psychological Counseling differs from philosophical counseling in order to establish the legitimacy of the new profession and to point out that they offer something different, or even better, compared to psychologists, who habitually play the leading role in the disciplines of Counseling and Psychotherapy.

From an epistemological viewpoint Paden (1998) argued that Philosophical Counseling still seems to be in a pre-paradigm period and is in need of a paradigm as meant by Kuhn (1962). It follows that a scrutinized inspection may not only reveal that
due to its newness, this field perhaps presents scientific challenges, but it is also “still unsure for its identity, its aims, methods, and its conceptual and legal relationship to other related disciplines” (Paden, 1998, p. 2). In this light, one could refer to a non-existence of a commonly accepted definition, even if Philosophical Counseling yields being “a member of a broader class of disciplines widely referred to as “the helping professions” (Paden, 1998, p. 3).

Moreover, the French Mark Sautet conceptualized and in 1992 activated the Cabinet de Philosophie, inherently opposed to the traditional psychotherapeutic methods—particularly to psychoanalysis (Grünbaum, 1984). In this context, the tendency to develop philosophical methods for dealing with human agony gravitated more as stance opposing psychoanalysis, rather than a departure in its own right—although it contributed with a finer, albeit non-systematic, communicative approach of the “patients,” with great inclination to Buber’s “I–Thou”, as Schuster (1999) noted. Although constitutently philosophical, the Cafélies afar from academic methods, while what takes place in its chambers bears scarce relation to Philosophical Counseling (Raabe, 2002, pp. 35-38).

Closer to psychological counseling and psychotherapeutic processes is Wise Therapy. LeBon (2001), its mastermind, stresses that nowadays, philosophy is once again called to play a significant role in human well-being, as it did in the context of Ancient Greek Philosophy. As LeBon (2001, p. 1) observes:

[Brian] is sad and sometimes gets depressed, but most of all wonders how he has come to lose touch with all that he used to think important. Clare is a young psychology undergraduate with a career decision looming over her. Alex, a dying woman with six months to live, urgently wants the opportunity to take stock of her life. … These people do not need to have their unconscious interpreted, or be clinically diagnosed.

In LeBon’s view, these people seem to be in need of a wise, philosophically oriented, therapy. Wise Therapy aims at developing a coherent synthesis of phenomenological, existential, and cognitive treatments with Philosophical Counseling, under their common scope of helping humans with “problems in living” (LeBon, 2001, p. xii).

Beyond the different orientations within the realm of Therapeutic Philosophy, certain common conceptual denominators may be identified, such as the idea that philosophy might not only enrich the discipline of Counseling and Psychotherapy but also broaden its horizons, even create new ones, by building therapeutic relationships afresh, through the “imbue” of Psychotherapy with philosophical principles and reflection (Flynn, 2005; Noutsos, 2001; Segal, 2007). Further, Therapeutic Philosophy advances philosophical thought by dedicating fresh psycho-cognitive analyses on issues which would otherwise remain untouched by traditional Psychotherapy (Binkley et al., 1998; LeBon, 2001; Schuster, 1999; Schultz & Ikiug, 2006; Schmidt, 2007). Importantly, Therapeutic Philosophy is literally not being communicated as Therapy, in that it indeed does not pathologize on, e.g., interpersonal relationships or ethical dilemmas, and does not conceive humans under, e.g., the psychodynamic deterministic lens, as “prisoners of unconscious.”

Therapeutic Philosophy significantly resembles psychotherapeutic approaches, and it might prove helpful to professional psychotherapists as well. Leading components of psychotherapeutic methods, such as Rational Emotive Therapy, Cognitive Therapy, Client-centered Therapy, Transactional Therapy, Existential Analysis, and the Humanistic approaches, have set foundations heeding philosophical principles, while
keeping their doctrines directly interlaced with the ancient Hellenic heritage. Despite such leading minds’ contemplation in such critical themes, established psychotherapies elude valuing philosophical dimensions and/or cooperation possibilities—as Van Deurzen’s (2006, p. 384) and Amir’s (2005) stark criticism attests—though they also might benefit for alleviating human agony. As Deurzen (2001) submits, philosophical practitioners and psychotherapists are doing a similar job in different ways. They have more to gain from cooperation than from competition and they can learn much from each other if they are willing to speak to each other and listen to what the other has to say. Keeping in mind that it is the client who will benefit from this synergy, I cannot think of any valid reasons to postpone our collaboration any longer. (p. 40)

A re-orientation of psychotherapy to philosophical roots seems reasonable in the contemporary flux—if both are to inaugurate innovative psychotherapeutic modi operandi; if they are to address the numerous—significant but beyond diagnoses—human impasses; and if, in the name of human wellbeing, they are to genuinely retract from ego-centric power claims, giving way to the birth of the new discipline, the philosophically-oriented psychotherapy, that could easily bridge percepts and applications on what has so far remained a no-man’s land: the existential void explicating human suffering.

THEORIZING PSYCHOLOGY FOR CLINICAL INTERVENTIONS

Theoretical Psychology is by definition a quite generic, almost indeterminable branch of Psychology, often regarded as a particular domain situated in the hinterland between Philosophy and Science, and as a scientific discipline that contains features both pursuits (cf. Bergman, 1953; Morawski, 2001; Sullivan, 2008; Valle & Halling, 1989). Vital methodological problems, though, also tend to emerge here.

For instance, in Kukla’s (2001) introductory remarks to theoretical methods in Psychology, a fundamental distinction of crucial importance is drawn between rationalists, who bring ratiocination into focus, and empiricists, on the other side, who emphasize observation. Kukla notes that “the type of scientific work favored by rationalists is theoretical work” whereas an “empirical project is one that requires observation at some stage” (pp. 1-2).

This disparity within the field of Psychology may be extrapolated to explain occurrences beyond its borders, relevant to its juxtaposition to Philosophy. These standpoints of visibly internal psychological affairs may shed some light on the methodological distance between Philosophy and Psychology: For while psychologists assume rational reflections derived from their observations on, applications for, and/or tentative interventions in human suffering—thus forming therapy as a solution—philosophers just appear to follow the opposite pathway, still advocating that empirical methods may well resolve this suffering, but after enduring philosophical questions on major existential human issues are focused upon—thus bringing therapy into effect. Ironically, should such remark be allowed, the historical separation between Philosophy and Psychology on therapeutic potentials might as well be seen as merely a matter of point of departure vs. destination point rather than one of orientation. In fact, it so appears that for this matter, the commencement of the former is the conclusion for the latter and vice versa. Despite the lucid clarifications on treating theory vs. praxis that may be lent to this debate by contemporaneous experimental psychological
applications—in vivo or in vitro inclined to create, evaluate and then test theories in relation to data and practice—the fact remains that emphasis on the empirical methods is clearly favored since the movement of Enlightenment has undermined attempts to resolve the theoretical problems by “theoretical means” (Kukla, 2001, p. 2).

At least two threats are of critical importance here. Firstly, conceptual psychological concerns, identified with or entangled in emergent philosophical assumptions and pertinent methodological problems in theories and consequent practices, present themselves precariously: They risk being both taken for granted and lie beyond critical reproach (evaluate theories in practice and “in theory”). However, in doing so, they engage in other conceptual, social, cultural and communicational tenets, which plainly originate outside the discipline, indeed, from philosophical positions. These are the very ones that Theoretical Psychology struggles to contain and prevent from evading its sensitive boundaries. Yet, these are the same positions which may, as shown here, transform its predicament to tussle among (a) effectiveness, (b) effectuality and (c) sound methodological coherence—Therapeutic Philosophy being potentially its superlative ally instead of a loosely perceived opponent.

Secondly, by hastiness to ponder into disclaimers as for its boundaries and extent of relatedness or not to rivals much energy is depleted, mostly in vain. For it entails putting up resistance against both, ideas stemming from the fields of alleged antagonists and thoughts to eventually provide a predefinition of its identity and scopes that would finally disambiguate misunderstandings on Theoretical Psychology. This is partly due to the fact that definition itself has been associated with attempts to highlight the essence of a phenomenon: To the detriment of important nuances and boundary issues (cf. Slife & Williams, 1997), this discipline considers historical research at the center of its analyses and prioritizes investigative efforts to clarify core notions such as “progress” in its course of affairs, thus neglecting its self-evident pursuit: to contemplate on its primary empirical and theory-testing quest. It consequently disregards plausible benefits from thoroughly examining meta-theoretical, meta-philosophical and philosophy of science perspectives, to ultimately account, as it should, for “the theoretical themes and problems that motivate the enterprise of psychology as a whole” (Slife & Williams, 1997, p. 118).

**EVIDENCE-BASED RESEARCH AND PRACTITIONER EXPERTISE**

According to APA (Dreier, 2011, p. 260) therapeutic practice intervention refers to particular aspects of what the clinical therapist does towards his/her clients in order to help them to effectively manage their mental pain. It stands for her/his causal powers over his/her client in the service for their cure (cf. solution-focused approaches). The term also tends to separate the pivotal powers of the therapist from other external and confounding influences on the treatment which are merely seen as moderating and mediating the effects of her/his intervention.

Bringing Philosophical Therapy in line with the meaning of therapeutic intervention, it seems worthwhile to point out that this kind of (psycho-) therapy has been shown to be effective in the support of a number of terminal patients, persons in mourning, redemptive patients with certain neuroses, as well as to medical and nursing staff, to Systemic Therapy and to a carefully eclectic philosophical therapy, introduced here as Synthetiki Psychotherapy—pertaining to synthesis of tenets.
In fact, Scott and his colleagues (2009) hold that particularly Martin Buber’s concepts of I-Thou in the context of the Philosophy of Medicine advanced by Pellegrino and Thomasma, provide a coherent philosophical platform against which measurement of plans for the reform of the entire U.S. medical system should develop. Also, Segal (2007) puts emphasis on therapy of patients, through the management of the meaning “kairos”, in accord with the sophistic standpoint, under the light of the Aristotelian meaning of the principle of “pisteis.” Kourkouta (2002) presents an innovative “application” of Ancient Greek Philosophical principles regarding the moral support of nursery staff, due to empathize with their patients and recognize / facilitate their special psychological needs, adding meaningfulness to their offer. Likewise, Papadimos (2004) describes the education of medical staff founded on the stoical philosophical principles presenting beneficial effects, especially regarding chronic diseases of patients. Feary (2002) and Cowap (2004) also appreciate the quality of support offered to patients with terminals illnesses when using philosophical principles in practice. Nestoros (2001; Nestoros et al., 1999) inaugurates the term “Synthetiki Psychotherapy”, a combination of Ancient Greek Philosophy and contemporary Neuroscience.

Moreover, Philosophical Therapy is portrayed to enrich the methodological materials of the discipline of Systemic [Family] Therapy (Bertram, 1993; Bertram et al., 1993; Bertram, 1996), and Triliva and Dafermos (2008) suggested the usage of philosophical dialogue as a clinical method in the therapeutic context of Systemic Psychotherapy for a more “positive psychology.” In parallel, Eng (1973) proposed the psychotherapeutic dimension of the Ancient Greek Sophistry – Rhetoric. Likewise, Papadimos and Murray (2008) make a profound analysis on Foucault’s “Fearless Speech,” as a verbal transsubstantiation of the Ancient Greek word “parrhesia” [=outspokenness] in mentoring medical students. Sahakian (1974, pp. 183-184) himself described the effectiveness of Philosophical Psychotherapy on a patient with manifest dys-functional schemata of thoughts and various acting-outs who eventually came through bereavement. Correspondingly, this approach has been shown to be more effective than other psychotherapeutic approaches in the case of a redemptive patient with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (Sahakian, 1980, pp. 37-40) and on psychologically “normal” people who need a motive for change.

Based on such actually empirical evidence of its range of operations, it becomes easier to envisage Philosophical Therapy as a legitimate branch in the constellation of psychotherapeutic applications, and as capable to open up the theoretical psychological dialogue between the scientific explanations of the objective psychology and the phenomenological descriptions of the philosophical one. Such dialogue would certainly lead to fruitful outcomes that would promise the foundations of a new methodology in Psychology.

**THERAPEUTIC PHILOSOPHY: RISING TO A CHALLENGE**

A systematic theoretical discourse with a crucial reference to vitality, with practical concerns and within the range of Philosophical Psychotherapy should be initiated—especially in Hellas, the matrix of both doctrines. Such discourse would not take for granted any easy historical juncture from which Philosophical Psychotherapy arose. Rather, it has to account for the major potentially applicable philosophical principles, in favor of particular groups of psychologically needy people. Also, it should dissect any “spontaneous,” already existing overlaps between the two fields, germane to the usage
of general principles of Philosophy to Psychotherapy, and vice versa. Also, it should painstakingly “chart” fields of possible reinforcement (or rejection) of various therapeutic applications. In this way, it can ascertain some common ground and/or contradictions on the relevant disciplines, to re-approach scientists of both Human Sciences as they define these fields to find theoretical and practical ways to exchange ideas, and demarcate a world of possibilities for meaningful cooperativeness between them. Ultimately, they should ascertain complementariness or even creative dialectical controversy amongst them, measured by the degree of receptivity of the very consenting patients, clients, visitors, or consumers of mental health services as the ultimate recipients and decisively valid judges of all operations.

In the current context, it is not redundant to remark that indeed in each single case, the nature of the psychological issues brought to psychotherapeutic environments eventually prove to involve, if not all, surely diverse and each time infinite varieties of additional themes, concerns, dilemmas, needs, problems, dissatisfactions, aspirations, expectations and wishes. This assortment of features of the very human life would seem unthinkable to exhaustively treat within the traditional psychotherapeutic milieu. With all its potential and artillery, conventional psychotherapeutic thinking cannot easily escape its own prioritizations – especially considering long waiting lists and specific diagnostics which inherently limit the actual effect of therapy in terms of duration, width, depth and multiplicity of operations. Besides, the complexity of such psychological issues that are not apparent, as they are reflexive in nature, involve a host of ethical and moral considerations that cannot be resolved in ways that are necessarily correct or false. Furthermore, with all its potency and expertise, by and large, traditional psychotherapy has not satisfied the expectations that it promised: to teach the fisherman how to fish and then endow him the freedom to manage on his own.

**IN REFLECTION**

Philosophical Therapy is promising as an innovative intervention for managing major live events—under the rigid condition of a “safe” control for crucial issues, as: Who is the patient and on what grounds does s/he seek psychotherapy? Which are the confounding variables of his/her influence? What are the conceptual prerequisites for his/her treatment?

Broadly, training in both requires a wide perspective that would ordinarily be considered as *philosophical* and as *psychological*, respectively. Furthermore, Theoretical Psychology is “*applied Philosophy*” inasmuch as it takes from Philosophy (along with other sources) intellectual tools, methodology, fundamental ideas, and brings them to bear on Psychology in a way that is specifically relevant to its main purposes and vital concerns (Howard, 1986). Correspondingly, Therapeutic Philosophy is “*applied Psychology*” insofar as it inadvertently treats human agony as described, diagnosed and understood by psychological points of view. Relations between both and other scholarly disciplines are part of mutual intellectual purviews. Consequently, it is on the basis of Philosophy *and* Psychology that the intellectual history of Epistemology, Ontology, Metaphysics, even Science and undoubtedly Ethics ought to be seen, them being collectively crucial by reflection.

Psychology’s interest in these conceptual issues has grown, despite its break with Philosophy, to establish a separate scientific and professional identity (Hatfield, 2002). Modern Psychology has viewed Theory’s kernel of truth as mere speculation or
hypothesis to be tested with objective scientific methods. Valid work in the Philosophy of Science, however, clarifies the theoretical nature of these methods (Lakatos & Musgrave, 1970). For instance, William James combined Philosophy with Psychology, Skinner articulated an a-theoretical but equally sweeping behaviourist alternative to the perceived excesses of “grand theory” psychoanalysis, and, last but not least, Brentano, Wundt and Dilthey established traditions of theory, such as the latter’s hermeneutic distinction between the natural and the human sciences, in contrast with the pragmatism and logical empiricism advocated in the United States (Tolman et al., 1996).

Theoretically, Therapeutic Philosophy could be conceived as an integrated psychological approach, because it covers core areas of the discipline including main theoretical positions; recognizes the scientific basis of the discipline; provides training in the range of stipulated methodologies; and scrutinizes analyses from an integral part of the scientific approach adopted. Hence, Therapeutic Philosophy may be so viewed as an epistemologically consistent therapeutic dimension. Therapeutic Philosophy and Theoretical Psychology could be meeting to establish some common ground. Both disciplines are now called upon to evaluate methods and foster corrective attitudes toward their own stance for the wider issues of Psychology, as a life science, as a method of understanding our mental, emotional and behavioral processes, and as a philosophy of our humanity (cf. Margolis, 1984).

In the background of contemporary affective phenomena of ebb and flow, of agony in suffering, of torment by oppression and of torture through dilemmas on choice, and yet in the very vicinity of human thriving to successes, of liberation from comparison, denial and silence, of empowerment for beneficial creativity and of inspiration to responsible solutions, we maintain that the person is faced with the challenge to discover strengths and potential derived from conceptualizations completely different than the habitual frameworks conventionally offered to partially alleviate, moderately lessen, or marginally decrease difficulty, while residuals on any aspect of experience threaten to continue the vicious circle of dissatisfaction. This is a unique point in time that amongst numerous dubious schemes in the purlieu of Psychology reliable approaches such as Coherence Therapy (Ecker & Hulley, 1996) shine to promote convergence of specialties as constructivist psychology and neurodynamics, while developed schools of thought such as Hardy Surge (Paleologou, in press) advance in meta-schemas movements on meta-therapy methodologies. This is also the moment that after spirals of inner absorption we witness Philosophy’s extravert proposals and applications in the service of human potential to generic thoughtfulness for wellbeing with Philosophical Psychotherapy exemplifying the means to realize enterprising perspectives by unification with psychotherapeutic essentials and indeed on cooperative conditions of controlled sophisticated convergence. Amidst surfeit of existing philosophies of psycho-therapies selective merging spirit is afoot! Invigoration can only come from within and mutual interests of theoreticians are the inherent force to guarantee for validity and reliability of ethically sound joint ventures. Challenges can so be met that edifying applications are only furnished with solid theoretical implements to fortify the person’s potency towards all the twists and turns of his/her journey by growing knowledgeable to be confident en route. In the background of the plethora of choices, skillful wisdom of each and every single person is our option as long as it constitutes the embodiment of our ancestry’s heritage in our future legacy.
REFERENCES

Ecker, B., & Hulley, L. (1996). Depth oriented brief therapy: How to be brief when you were trained to be deep, and vice versa. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
Rizos, G., & Bousoulas, K. (2010). *The psychotherapeutic process in the group context as it is applied on philosophical psychology and psychotherapy. The therapeutic effectiveness.* Paper presented at the 3rd Panhellenic Congress of Counselling Psychology, Crete, 6-9 May.


CONTRIBUTORS
CONTRIBUTORS

Sandra Luzia de Souza Alencar is a member of the University of São Paulo’s (USP) Psychoanalysis and Society Laboratory, practices psychology at the Municipal Health Secretariat of São Paulo, and is a supervisor of the Migration and Culture Project at USP.
Email: sandra.lsalencar@gmail.com

Sonia Altoé is Professor in the Post-Graduate Program in Psychoanalysis, University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), Brazil.
Email: soniaaltoe@gmail.com

Electra Anagnostopoulou studied Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology at the University of Athens and Developmental Psychology at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. Her clinical work focuses on children with developmental disorders and their families and her research on special education and psychosocial services in the Netherlands and in Greece.
Email: electra1@hotmail.com

Cor Baerveldt is a Cultural Psychologist and Associate Professor at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada. He is interested in the expressive aspects of self and emotion, embodiment and the historical and philosophical foundations of cultural psychology. His current work focuses on the notion of “style” in Merleau-Ponty’s social ontology.
Email: cor@ualberta.ca

Sertan Batur is a PhD candidate at University of Vienna. He is currently interested in the history of psychology.
Email: sertanbatur@gmail.com

Ioanna C. Bitchava is a Doctoral candidate in Clinical Psychology and qualified for two MDT-P.HardySurge™ Modules (“Integrative Self” and “Bereavement Management”). Her main interests are Cogni-Psy-Physio-logical Hardy Surge Well Being and Psychological Assessment and Measurement with innovative Research Methodologies.
Email: ioannabiti@yahoo.gr

Mary Breheny researches in Critical Health and Community Psychology, focusing on the economic, family, and community lives of older people. She is currently investigating economic living standards among older people.
Email: M.R.Breheny@massey.ac.nz

Alexander J. Bridger is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Huddersfield, UK. He recently completed a PhD about the development of the situationist practice of psychogeography as a psychological method. His research interests include psychogeography, deep topography, cultural geography, yoga and critical psychology.
Email: a.j.bridger@hud.ac.uk

Niklas A. Chimirri studied Psychology, Media & Communication and Politics in Berlin, Padova and New York. He is currently a PhD Fellow at the program “Social Psychology of Everyday Life” at Roskilde University, Denmark. His project investigates kindergarten children’s everyday use of electronic media technologies and concomitant political implications.
E-mail: chimirri@ruc.dk
Manolis Dafermos is philosopher (PhD, Lomonosov Moscow State University/Russia) and Assistant Professor in Epistemology of Psychology at the Department of Psychology of the University of Crete (Greece). His interests include cultural psychology, activity theory, history of psychology, and methodological and epistemological issues in the social sciences. Email: mdafermo@psy.soc.uoc.

Jannes Eshuis studied Theoretical and Experimental Psychology at Utrecht University. His main fields of interest are evolutionary psychology, history of psychology and philosophy of science. He is now working at the Open University of the Netherlands, where he is teaching and working on a PhD thesis. Email: Jannes.Eshuis@ou.nl

Rachel Joffe Falmagne is Professor of Psychology and former President of the International Society for Theoretical Psychology. Her interests and publications center on feminist theory, critical psychology, methodological and epistemological issues for the social sciences, transdisciplinary feminist approaches to reasoning and epistemology, and, most recently, the affective roots of thought. Email: rfalmagne@clarku.edu

Silvia Federici is a long-time feminist activist and teacher. She has taught at the University of Port Harcourt (Nigeria) and is Professor Emerita of International Studies and Political Philosophy at New College of Hofstra University. She is the author of Caliban and the witch: Women, the body and primitive accumulation. Email: dinavalli@aol.com

Arthur Arruda Leal Ferreira is Professor of the History of Psychology at the Institute of Psychology at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. He has recently served as editor of books on Portuguese History of Psychology: Directions and paths, AN Theory and Psychology, and Pragmatism and contemporary questions. He has also written articles in the books Foucault today; Foucault and psychology; From modern metaphysics to pragmatism, and Psychology and institutions in Brazil. Email: arleal@superig.com.br

Gabriela Gramkow is a PhD student at the Program of Postgraduate Studies in Social Psychology at the Catholic University of Sao Paulo. She is also a member of the Group of Mental Health and Juvenile Justice. Email: gabigkw@hotmail.com

Scott Greer is Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Prince Edward Island in Charlottetown, Canada. He has published on a variety of topics, including the self, consciousness, and the relationship of Freud and Nietzsche. His current project, using the concept of presence, re-theorizes memory as based on metonymic relationships between the subject and space and time. Email: sgreer@upei.ca

Andrés Haye is Associate Professor at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. His research focus includes the role played by language in the articulation of psychological functions such as memory, thinking, and emotion. Current research interests include the use of diverse research methods to study how ideological meanings are at play in basic processes involved in historical memory, political attitudes, social prejudice, and social interactions. Email: ahaye@uc.cl

Ericka Marie Itokazu has a post-doctorate in Modern Philosophy from the University of Milan-Bicocca and a PhD in the History of Philosophy from the University of São Paulo (USP). She is a researcher in the History of Philosophy with a post-doctoral position at USP. She is also a founder member of the Spinoza Studies Group of USP and coordinates the Filo-Espinosa’s collection books by Autentica editors. Email: marie.ericka@gmail.com
Chris Janeke is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of South Africa. His main research areas are cognitive science, and he is particularly interested in computational intelligence techniques such as neural networks for data mining and for the simulation of human cognition.
Email: hjcianek@gmail.com

Gordana Jovanović is Professor of Psychology at the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, and University of Belgrade, Serbia. Her interests are theoretical psychology, cultural psychology, and qualitative research.
Email: gjovanov@f.bg.ac.rs

Giorgos Kakarinos is a PhD candidate in Philosophy of Science at the Technical University of Crete. He has graduated in 2008 from the Medical School of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and in 2010 he completed a graduate program in Brain and Mind Sciences, in the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Crete. His main interests include Philosophy of Science, Epistemology of Psychology and Epistemology of Biology.
Email: geokak83@yahoo.gr

Andrea Kleebenberg-Niepage researched and taught developmental psychology with a focus on historical, social and cultural differences of childhood and especially on the empowerment of working children. Her current research focuses on the reconstruction of biographies of right-wing adolescents and young adults and the interconnection between extremism and mainstream society.
E-Mail: dr.kleebenberg-niepage@web.de

Emmanouel P. Kougioumzoglou is a Doctoral candidate in Ancient Greek Philosophy and in process of becoming a Chartered licentiate in Psychology and Sociology. His main interests are in philosophical psychotherapy, Psychological MDT.P.Hardiness, counseling in terminal patients, and research and applications on criminology and victimology.
Email: emmanouel85@hotmail.com

Steve Larocco teaches theory at Southern Connecticut State University in the United States. He is currently working on a book on emotions and ethics. He has published essays on shame, forgiveness, gift theory, mimesis, seduction, and tragedy.
Email: larocos1@southernct.edu

Wahbie Long is a Clinical Psychologist and Lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of Cape Town. He is completing a PhD on the history of the “relevance” debate in South African psychology.
Email: wahbie.long@uct.ac.za

Ole Jacob Madsen is a Clinical Psychologist and Philosopher and holds a PhD from the University of Bergen, Norway. His research interests include the therapeutic culture and various ethical and ideological aspects regarding psychology and society.
E-mail: ole.madsen@svt.uib.no

Matleena Mäenpää is a PhD student in Educational Psychology at the University of Oulu, Finland. Research interests include counseling, counseling psychology, and consultative methods.
Email: matleena.maenpaa@oulu.fi

Wolfgang Maiers is a Professor of General Psychology and Dean of the Faculty of Applied Human Sciences at the Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal (University of Applied Sciences). He is also apl. Professor at the Free University of Berlin, Psychology Department as well as a (Co-) Director of the Klaus Holzkamp-Institute for Subject Science of the International Academy for Innovative Pedagogy, Psychology and Economics (INA) at the Free University of Berlin. His main interests include Theory and History of Psychology; Subject-scientific Theory of Action and Learning.
Email: wolfgang maiers@hs-magdeburg.de
Athanasios Marvakis (Dipl.-Psych., Dr. rer. soc., University of Tübingen/Germany) is Associate Professor in Clinical Social Psychology at the School of Primary Education of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece). His interests revolve around psychology and its relations with the various forms of social inequalities and social exclusion, including youth as a social group and migrants/refugees in Greece. During recent years he has started to be engaged in the critical psychology of learning and the “schooling-complex.”
Email: marvakis@eled.auth.gr

Mihalis Mentinis holds a temporary teaching position in social psychology at the University of Crete (Greece).
Email: m.mentinis@googlemail.com

Dahlia Moore (PhD, Tel Aviv University) is Dean of Behavioral Sciences at the College of Management, Israel. She deals with social justice and social conflict, and focuses on gender issues. Her last book, Two steps forward, one step back: Changing women, changing society (Academic Studies Press, 2012) sums up years of research on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
Email: dmoore@colman.ac.il

Martin Morf retired in 2001 from a position in the Department of Psychology at the University of Windsor, Canada. Since then he has travelled the globe in a moderately successful search for clues to human beginnings. Email: morf@uwindsor.ca

Johanna Motzkau (PhD, C. Psychol., Dipl.-Psych.), is a lecturer in Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University, UK. Originally from Berlin, she has a background in Philosophy, German Kritische Psychologie, theoretical and forensic psychology. Drawing on the work of Deleuze, Bergson and Stengers, her research focuses on memory, suggestibility, the interaction of psychology and law, children’s rights and sexual abuse.
Email: J.F.Motzkau@open.ac.uk

Ilana Mountian is an Honorary Research Fellow at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK, and Research Fellow at the Universidade Federal de Minas (PRODOC/CAPES), Brazil. Her main research areas are on gender, immigration and drug use. She is the author of Cultural Ecstasies: Drugs, gender and social imaginary (Routledge, 2012).
Email: imountian@yahoo.com

Klaus Nielsen is Professor of Educational Psychology, Aarhus University. His academic interests are learning in practice and apprenticeship learning. In later years the critical analysis of why students drop out of the Danish VET-system has been central to his work.
Email: klausn@psy.au.dk

Mario Orozco-Guzmán is a Psychoanalyst and President of Espace Analítique Mexico, as well as Professor at the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolas de Hidalgo. He is author of the book La soberanía del acto: un estudio introductorio a la noción de crimen en Freud (2007).
Email: orguzmo@yahoo.com.mx

Desmond Painter is Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. His research interests include theoretical psychology and the critical social psychology of language, especially in postcolonial societies. He was co-editor, with Clifford van Ommen, of Interiors: A history of psychology in South Africa (2008).
Email: dpainter@sun.ac.za
Angel-M. Paleologou is Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychology-Psychotherapy at Ioannina University, Greece, Cognitive Therapist (UK), Hardiness Success Instructor (USA), LLL-Coach, Tele-Mentor, e-Clinician, Victimization-vs-Bereavement Consultant, and Ethics Advisor. She is the author of four manuals, three textbooks, several EU-funded research papers, and Architect of The ©MDT. P. HardySurge™ Approach.
Email: angelpaleo@gmail.com

David Pavón-Cuéllar is Professor at the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Morelia, Mexico. He is author of the books Marxisme lacanien (Paris, Psychophores, 2009) and From the conscious interior to an exterior unconscious: Lacan, discourse analysis and social psychology (Karnac, 2010).
Email: pavoncuellardavid@yahoo.fr

Brad Piekkola is a University-College Professor at Vancouver Island University in British Columbia, Canada. He received his PhD at the University Of Victoria for his assessment of modern theories of personality. Since then he has taught psychology and has pursued his interests in the history and theories of psychology.
Email: Brad.Piekkola@viu.ca

Melinda Pinfold completed her PhD in Psychology in 2009 at the University of Alberta, Canada. The title of her dissertation was “Psychology and the arts: Nineteenth-century roots of an interdisciplinary project.” Currently, the author works as a visual arts curator, essayist and contract instructor. She teaches courses in the History and Theory of Art, Design and Visual Culture at the University of Alberta.
Email: mpinfold@ualberta.ca

Antti Rantanen is a PhD student in Educational Psychology, University of Oulu, Finland.
Email: antti.rantanen@oulu.fi

Dieter Redlich studied at Heidelberg, Frankfurt, and later at Bochum and Paderborn universities, doing an M.A. in Romance studies, history, and philosophy. His PhD was in philosophy and sociology. He did the two state exams to become a teacher, passed additional examinations in English and Education. He taught philosophy at Bochum University and in the Republic of Ireland. He has published on Kant, Hegel, Marx, Lenin, and on historical issues like the Palestine conflict and the Commune de Paris.
Email: redlich-dieter@t-online.de

Miriam Debieux Rosa is Professor at the University Of São Paulo Institute Of Psychology, where she coordinates the Psychoanalysis and Society Laboratory and the Migration and Culture Project. She is also Professor of Post-Graduate Social Psychology at the Pontificial Catholic University of São Paulo, and coordinates their Research Center for Psychoanalysis and Policy.
E-mail: debieux@terra.com.br

Nora Ruck is a Lecturer of Psychology at the University of Vienna. She has recently finished her PhD thesis, “Darwinian Aesthetics?”; an attempt to trace the science historical and socio-historical conditions under which evolutionary psychology has evolved. Her research interests include the history and theory of psychology and feminist psychology.
Email: nora.ruck@univie.ac.at

Rose Cheptoo Ruto-Korir has a PhD from the University of Pretoria, South Africa. She is a Senior Lecturer in Educational Psychology at Moi University, Kenya. She chairs the School Graduate Studies and is the Chief Editor of Educational Journal of Behavioral Science.
Email: korircheptoo@gmail.com
Megali Milene Silva is a PhD student in the Post-Graduate Program in Psychoanalysis, UERJ.

Thomas Slunecko is Professor in the Department for Basic Psychological Research at the University of Vienna’s Faculty of Psychology and head of the Institute of Cultural Psychology and Qualitative Social Research. His research interests include media theory, cultural psychology/philosophy, critical epistemology, discourse analysis, and development of qualitative methods especially in the field of image interpretation.
Email: thomas.slunecko@univie.ac.at

Dorothy Smith is retired from the University of Toronto and is currently an Adjunct Professor in Sociology at the University of Victoria. She has been preoccupied for the past thirty or so years with developing institutional ethnography as a sociology for people that started out as a sociology for women. She has published numerous papers and several books, including what is probably her best known work, The everyday world as problematic: A feminist sociology (1987).
Email: desmith@uvic.ca

Hannu Soini is a Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Oulu, Finland.
Email: hannu.soini@oulu.fi

Anja Hvildfeldt Stanek is Assistant Professor at University of Southern Denmark.
Email: stanek@ruc.dk

Christine Stephens teaches health promotion and research methods at Massey University, New Zealand. She has published Health promotion: A psychosocial approach (2008) and is currently involved in longitudinal research regarding the health and wellbeing of older people in New Zealand.
Email: C.Y.Stephens@massey.ac.nz

Gavin Sullivan is a Senior Lecturer in psychology at Leeds Metropolitan University. His research focuses on Wittgenstein’s philosophy, reflexivity, qualitative research methods, social constructionism/discursive psychology, self-conscious/self-evaluative emotions, mixed/ambivalent emotions, collective emotions, national pride/nationalism/patriotism, and critical health psychology.
Email: gsullivan34@yahoo.com; G.Sullivan@leedsmet.ac.uk

Teemu Suorsa is a Researcher at the University of Oulu, Finland and a scholarship holder of the Kone Foundation.
Email: teemu.suorsa@oulu.fi

Thomas Teo is Professor in the History and Theory of Psychology Program at York University (Toronto), editor of the Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology and the Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology. He has been analyzing the historical and theoretical foundations of the social sciences, the human sciences, and psychology, and he discusses the ontological, epistemological, and ethical-political challenges to these fields.
Email: tteo@yorku.ca

Sofia Triliva is an Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Crete (Greece). Her research interests are in community psychology, more specifically, the creation, application and evaluation of anti-racism and family support programming.
Email: triliva@uoc.gr

Giouli Tsirtoglou, is a Psychologist who obtained her MA in Social Clinical Psychology from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. She worked in the coordination and realization of psychosocial European Projects (NGO) and then in the field of Clinical Psychology. Her MA thesis was a praxis research on subjectivity on the basis of Critical Psychology.
Email: tsirtoglou_g@yahoo.gr
Vasi Van Deventer teaches general psychology, psychometric design, research methodology, personality theory and consulting psychology at the University of South Africa. His research interests are in theoretical and philosophical psychology, particularly in the domains of teaching design and self-referential systems.
Email: vdevesh@unisa.ac.za

René Van Hezewijk is Dean of the Faculty of Psychology of the Open University of the Netherlands. His interests are theoretical psychology, especially evolution and psychology, and the history of psychology. He is the Editor of the Netherlands Journal of Psychology. He was treasurer and president of the ISTP.
Email: rene.vanhezewijk@ou.nl; renevanhezewijk@gmail.com

Hans Van Rappard has taught History and Theory of Psychology at the Free University of Amsterdam. In 1982 he founded Cheiron-Europe (later ESHHS) and, with Michael Hyland, ISTP in 1985. After retirement he turned to Comparative or Intercultural Philosophy, focusing on Chinese thought.
Email: hansvanrappard@collectieconsult.nl

Stephen Vassallo is Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology at American University. His work centers on merging inter- and intra-disciplinary perspectives to critically explore issues related to teaching and learning academic self-regulation. He is currently writing a book tentatively titled Self-regulated learning: An application of critical educational psychology.
Email: vassallo@american.edu

Maria Cristina G. Vicentin is professor of post-graduate social psychology at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo. She is also a member of the Group of Mental Health and Juvenile Justice which aims to promote advances in policy mental health for adolescents in São Paulo.
E-mail: cristinavicentin@gmail.com.br

Brady Wagoner completed his PhD in Psychology at the University of Cambridge and is now Associate Professor at Aalborg University. He is the chief organizer of the Sir Frederic Bartlett Archive and has recently published Culture and social change: Transforming society through the power of ideas.
Email: wagoner@hum.au.dk

Rebecca Weber is a doctoral student in Social Psychology at the Université de Lyon II, France. Her research interests are focused on gender identity transmission and qualitative methodologies. She also works as a Psychologist in school settings, notably on questions of social cohesion.
Email: rebecca.weber@univ-lyon2.fr

Martin Wieser is PhD fellow at the DK-Plus Program “The Sciences in Historical, Philosophical and Cultural Contexts” at the Faculty of Historical and Cultural Studies and Teaching Assistant at the Department of Psychology, University of Vienna. His research interests focus on the history and philosophy of science and their political, technological and socio-cultural implications, especially in the history of Western Psychology.
Email: martin.wieser@univie.ac.at
As a theme for theoretical psychology, *Doing Psychology under New Conditions* implies a complex context and shifting background against which our conceptual, philosophical and critical work is briefly foregrounded. As the contributors to this edition of the conference proceedings show, new connections are forged between previously independent intellectual activities, political allegiances and solidarities shift and change, and previously unanticipated situations require new responses. The papers in the volume highlight changes to the environments in which psychology operates that are not merely re-iterations of previous theoretical topics.